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The causes and consequences of interactions between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal primary school children from the perspective of their parents

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**THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF INTERACTIONS
BETWEEN ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL
PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE
OF THEIR PARENTS**

BY

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USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

Racism is found in all societies but is a particular problem in post-colonial immigrant-majority societies where the indigenous population have been dispossessed of their land and experience social injustices. Aboriginal people are the most disadvantaged group in Australian society and despite the current policies of self-determination and cultural pluralism they remain at the bottom of all social indicators. The aim of this study is to examine the causes and consequences of racism against Aboriginal children from the perspective of their parents. To do this a case-study of seven Aboriginal parents with primary school aged children was undertaken to see what explanations they gave for the causes of racism in schools and the wider community as well as how they prepare their children to deal with it.

The study indicates that there is a need for all non-Aboriginal people to become aware of Aboriginal culture in order to eradicate racism and intolerance in schools and the wider community. Aboriginal people feel that the wider community's perceptions of them is based on ignorance and misunderstanding and these perceptions are continuing to exclude and marginalise Aboriginal people from society.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature

Date

1/9/96

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACT	Australian Commonwealth Territories
AEW	Aboriginal Education Worker
ALO	Aboriginal Liaison Officer
ASSPA	Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
NAEC	National Aboriginal Education Committee
NIRV	National Inquiry Into Racist Violence
N.T.	Northern Territory
NUDIST	Non-Numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorising
RCIADC	Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TEE	Tertiary Entrance Examination
WA	Western Australia
WAAECG	Western Australian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group

INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

The history of interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people has been one of conquest and domination. The non-Aboriginal community over the last two centuries has tried to deal with Aboriginal people alternately by attempting to destroy Aboriginal identity by genocide, by biological assimilation and by cultural integration. Generally Aboriginal people have resisted these attempts at forced assimilation and integration, in contrast to the freely chosen assimilation of most migrant people (Wootten 1991).

Aboriginal people identify themselves as Aboriginal which sets them apart culturally and historically from the rest of the Australian population. Australian society has not yet come to understand and appreciate Aboriginal culture. There is a need to change Australian thinking to value, recognise and support the culture of Aboriginal people so that they don't remain at the bottom of all social indicators. This would help to repair generations of indifference and social injustice experienced by the Aboriginal population.

The situation is not unique to Australia. The Indians of North America, the Inuit of Canada, Alaska and Greenland, the Maori people of New Zealand and the Sami of Scandinavia all share common problems of inequality and injustice both economically, politically and socially which may best be explained by their common history of foreign cultures invading and dispossessing them from their land without any regard to their rights or basic needs (Bereson and Matheson 1992; Wootten 1991) Despite this treatment, indigenous groups maintain their separate identity but also share common social problems such as poverty, alienation from the education system, unemployment, poor housing, poor health and substance abuse.

If a dominant society denies recognition of the very things on which an individual's

identity is built, then that individual will become a deviant from the point of view of the society. This is what has occurred to Aboriginal people since British colonisation of Australia two hundred years ago. In their endeavour to colonise a new land, Europeans, who regarded themselves as superior Christian people, rationalised their actions by racist theories and assumptions such as Social Darwinism which were built into the society's attitudes and institutions and continue to operate in some form today. Aboriginal people were treated as being unable to manage their own affairs, and subjected to protectionist policies which gave the state the right to remove children from their natural parents and deny them the right to practice their own culture. As a result there has developed a complex and difficult situation to which there is no simple answer.

Racism is a sensitive issue and one which affects Aboriginal and other ethnic minority groups in Australia to varying degrees. It is difficult to assess the extent of racism Aboriginal people experience in their day to day lives. This study will examine Aboriginal parents perceptions of racist attitudes in their local community. In particular the study will focus on the experiences of their primary school aged children both at school and in the wider community to see how these attitudes impact on their lives.

Significance of the study

In Australia, Aboriginal people continue to be disadvantaged socially, economically and politically. The following figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1991) reveal that despite some improvements in socio-economic position since the 1986 Census, social indicators such as life expectancy, income, employment, educational qualifications and retention rates all remain significantly lower in comparison to non-Aboriginal people, while imprisonment rates are much higher when compared to non-Aboriginal.

Demographics

The Aboriginal population comprise 1.6% of the total Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1991). 28% of the Aboriginal population live in capital cities and just under 20% in rural and remote areas with 50% in towns and rural localities. This means that most Aboriginal people were living in areas where they are a minority and of necessity must interact regularly with the non-Aboriginal population.

Life Expectancy

The Aboriginal population growth rate has shown an increase of 16.6% since the 1986 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1991). Aboriginality in the Census is self-determined and this growth may be due to an increased willingness of individuals to identify themselves as Aboriginal. According to the Department of Employment, Education and Training (1991, p. 4) "An Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which she or he lives or has lived."

The census revealed that there is a disproportionate number of Aboriginal children and youth relative to other Australians - 70% of the Aboriginal population were less than 30 years of age compared with 47% for the total population. In older age groups the difference is even greater. Only 6% of the Aboriginal population were aged over 55 years compared with 20% of the non-Aboriginal population. The reasons attributed to this were the higher birth and mortality rates of Aboriginals compared with those of non-Aboriginals.

Families

Multi-family extended households were a feature of the Aboriginal population. Almost 12% of the Aboriginal population were counted in multi-family households

compared with less than 1% of the non-Aboriginal population. Over one quarter of Aboriginal families were one parent families compared with less than 9% of non-Aboriginal families. These figures indicate that the family structure of most Aboriginal families differs from the majority of non-Aboriginal people and therefore their social experiences will differ.

Housing

The proportion of Aboriginal dwellings which were rented was 64.0%. This compared with just over 25% for the non-Aboriginal population. 2.5% of the Aboriginal population lived in improvised dwellings such as sheds, tents and other temporary structures compared with 0.2% of the non-Aboriginal population.

Incomes

Almost two thirds (63.5%) of the Aboriginal population aged 15 years and over reported an income of under \$12,000 per year compared with 45% of the non-Aboriginal population. At the other end of the scale just 2.2% of Aboriginal people reported an income of over \$35,000 per year compared with over 11% of non-Aboriginal people.

Employment

At the time of the 1991 Census, unemployment amongst Aboriginal people was almost three times higher than that for non-Aboriginal people. 30.8% of the Aboriginal population were unemployed compared with 11.4% of the non-Aboriginal population. There were marked differences in the unemployment rate between States. The rate ranged from 19% in the ACT to over 36% in WA.

28% of Aboriginal people were employed in unskilled and semi-skilled occupations compared with 13% of non-Aboriginal people. At the other end of the scale only 4.7% of the Aboriginal population were employed as managers and administrators

compared with 12.9% of non-Aboriginal people.

Educational Qualifications

The census revealed large differences in the number of years of education between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Over 40% of the Aboriginal population had left school before the age of 16 years compared with 36% of non-Aboriginal people. The number of Aboriginal people who left school at 17 years or older was 17.3% compared with 34% of the non-Aboriginal population. 8.6% of the Aboriginal population were attending a tertiary institution compared with over 21% of the non-Aboriginal population. Almost 80% of the Aboriginal population had no post-secondary school qualifications compared with 61% of the non-Aboriginal population. The need for a greater focus on education is heightened by the current age structure of Aboriginal people which has a high proportion of youth in comparison to the rest of the population.

Retention Rates

While retention rates for Aboriginal students in Western Australia are rising, they are still significantly less than non-Aboriginal students. The current figures from the Education Department of Western Australia (1993) showed that the proportion of Aboriginal students remaining at school until year 12 was 9.9 % in 1986 and 22.8% in 1993 in comparison to the non-Aboriginal rates of 48.1% in 1986 and 70.8% in 1993.

Exclusion Rates

The Equal Opportunity Commission Report (1990) claimed that between 1984 and 1989, an average of 20 students were excluded from WA schools each year. Aboriginal students account for 33.9% of the excluded students despite representing only 2.9% of the school's population.

Imprisonment Rates

Aboriginal people in prisons and other corrective institutions represented over 12% of the total prison population although they represent only 1.6% of the total Australian population.

These figures clearly show that Aboriginal people remain significantly disadvantaged in terms of all main social indicators. The recommendations of the RCIADC (1991) have identified a plan of action for governments to address Aboriginal disadvantage. A recent media report claims that governments have a lack of commitment to implementing these recommendations to improve Aboriginal peoples position in society in culturally acceptable ways (*West Australian* 18/7/94 p.10-11). This is evident in the fact that since the RCIADIC Aboriginal people are dying in prison at almost three times the rate as in the period covered by the royal commission.

Although all governments in Australia have committed themselves to use imprisonment as a last resort, there has been a 50 per cent increase in the number of Aboriginal people in prison in the last six years. Many people are still being sent to prison for minor offences such as non-payment of fines (*West Australian*, 1995). The RCIADC (1991) and the Human Rights Commission National Inquiry into Racist Violence (1991) have argued that Australia is a fundamentally racist society and Aboriginal people are faced with racism in almost every aspect of their daily lives.

The NAEC (1993) claimed that the racist attitudes towards Aboriginal people which existed in the general community leads to Aboriginal children developing a dislike for schooling and a tendency to reject it. These attitudes are often worse in country towns and areas where the Aboriginal population forms a minority group which suffers from the attitudes of the majority population.

Racism is a sensitive issue in education. In NSW and Victoria there is an Anti-Racist Policy and teachers are aware that they can be taken to court for discriminatory behaviour. Western Australia has no such policy or established guidelines for appeal

which makes the process difficult to initiate. Although the existence of such a policy does not change attitudes it can help to modify behaviour. The Western Australian Ministry of Education has published a Social Justice in Education Policy (1991) which outlines priorities which need to be met to achieve an equitable education for Aboriginal students. One of these priorities is to work towards the elimination of racism within the school environment.

While there has been an increase in Aboriginal deaths in prisons there has been a decrease in Aboriginal deaths while in police custody (*West Australian*, 1995). Also with respect to addressing the Third World living conditions which many Aboriginal communities experience there has been an increase in government spending to help alleviate the problems in these communities. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission released spending details which indicate that West Australian Aboriginal people will get 37 per cent of a \$60 million package to improve living and health conditions in remote communities (*West Australian*, 1995) .

The Purpose of the Study

The history of conflict between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians and the current statistics and senate reports indicate that Aboriginal people are still subject to racism both at the institutional and individual level. The purpose of this study will be to examine the extent to which Aboriginal parents perceive racism against their children at school and in the wider community. The study will also look at how Aboriginal parents explain the construction of racism. That is, what types of actions and statements do individuals and institutions perpetrate against Aboriginal people which Aboriginal parents perceive to be racist in nature. The final purpose of this study will be to examine how parents prepare their children to deal with racism in the community and what they perceive to be the consequences of racism for their children.

Research Questions

1. How do Aboriginal parents define "racism"?
2. What is the extent of racism against primary school aged Aboriginal children as perceived by their parents?
3. How do Aboriginal parents explain the construction of racism against their children?
4. What consequences of racism do parents perceive for their children?
5. What do Aboriginal parents do to prepare their children for racial conflicts at school and in the wider society?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Postmodern Perspective

Postmodernism as a philosophy encompasses a diverse range of viewpoints and theories and spans almost every discipline; philosophy, sociology, politics, architecture, law, literature and the arts in general. Postmodernists such as Adorno and Horkheimer claimed the natural world had become an abstract, formal concept of categories (cited in Docherty, 1993, p. 5) which was largely brought about by humanity's desire to master nature. They feared that through the process of applying formal categories to material realities, reasoning was being reduced to a language which did not take into consideration other realities such as imagination, dreams and creativity. Knowledge was reduced to that which can be named, while that which cannot be named in this way escapes consciousness entirely.

Postmodernism is an approach to sociology which focuses on promoting understanding of postmodern conditions such as globalisation, an information society, the increasing disparity between rich and poor and the subsequent disappearance of the middle class. The emphasis is on heterogeneity and plurality with sociologists acting more as interpreters of social conditions to promote understanding rather than to support or criticise it (Hollinger, 1994).

Postmodernism signifies a break away from the features of modernity. Featherstone (1991) described modernity as the time in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century where progressive economic and administrative rationalisation and differentiation of the social world processes eventuated in the modern capitalist-industrialist state. Baudrillard (cited in Gane, 1991) and Lyotard (1984) claimed that the new forms of technology and information have resulted in a shift from a productive to a reproductive social order and so postmodernism has become the dominant culture even though the features of modernism are still evident in society

(Jameson, 1984).

Postmodernism in Multicultural Societies

The features of postmodernity are "those texts, images, discourses, each formed within particular technologies or media, each with its own way of organising the intervention on the real, and each with its mode of subject formation." (Jameson, cited in Docherty, 1993, p. 451). Each individual is affected by these various discourses which impact on the individual's perception of reality (Jameson, cited in Doring, 1993, p. 449) and include information technology, the media and multinational capitalism.

The globalisation of the world creates problems for a multicultural society seeking an identity. Hinkson (1991) describes the state of the postmodern world as one where the computer and telecommunications have created a unified space within which the information processes eat away at the culturally differentiated space which was typical of relations between cultures before the industrial revolution. Cultures are now forced to accommodate to the postmodern culture which integrates on a world scale.

Postmodern societies are breaking down the 'grand narratives' from the past and there is now a new depthlessness and weakening of history (Jameson 1984). Grand narratives are those narratives which have marked modernity - such as the emancipation of reason and freedom, the enrichment of all humanity through the progress of capitalist techno-science, the 'settlement' of Australia and the salvation of creatures through the conversion of souls to the Christian narrative of martyred love. These narratives have a goal of legitimating social and political institutions and practices, laws, ethics and ways of thinking. (Lyotard, 1984).

Racial and ethnic groups who are seeking their identity are dominated by the need to construct narratives of redemption and emancipation which are free from the

Eurocentric narratives of the past. These cultural forms are using the new technological means to create awareness and retell history. As Gilroy (1990) stated, the question now is whose master narratives are collapsing and whose are growing? Kellner (1988) argues against macro theories in favour of a plurality of language games, of localised knowledges or "little narratives".

Post-colonial, multicultural societies such as Australia are in the position of constructing a post-colonial identity. Milner (1991, p. 116) describes Australia as a 'postmodern archetype' due to its history of only approximating cultural or social modernity. Post-colonialism has become Australia's own distinctive postmodern condition where the nation can no longer draw its identity from one homogeneous ethnic group but needs to create cohesion through diversity. The postmodern condition means that humanity now inhabits a space which is capable of supporting cultural diversity where previously assimilation was considered the only alternative (Kalantzis, 1988). During (1987) described this as a need to create an image which is free of Eurocentric concepts and images.

The impact of postmodern cultural theory and feminist cultural theory has led to changes in the broader cultural sphere. The production, consumption and circulation of goods has led to broader shifts in the balance of power and interdependencies between groups. It is not just power but also the languages, metaphors and images that have been designed to silence those whom they represent. For example, Aboriginal media practices have challenged the terms on which issues of race, colonialism, cultural value, national identity and land ownership are publicly discussed and have powerfully affected political and intellectual life. Similarly, so have feminist campaigns around images of women and the efforts of migrant groups to change the 'norm' of Anglo-Celtic Australia (Frow & Morris, 1993, p. xiv). The changes in the everyday practices and experiences of different groups lead to new means of orientation and identity structures (Featherstone, 1991, p.11).

Australia has had a history of racism since European colonisation. The pre-existing Aboriginal societies were destroyed. Kalantzis (1988) argued that racism has been used by post-war governments to sell their immigration programs to the Australian people who felt threatened by immigration. In the 1960s the White Australia Policy claimed that Europeans who were 'like us' would create jobs and improve living standards but Asians would have a detrimental effect because they were unlike us. Thus people were consoled about immigration policies through ideological arguments along racist lines (Kalantzis, 1988, p. 91). In the 1970s the Whitlam government introduced the non-discriminatory immigration policy and Asian nations became sources for immigrants which continues to be the approach today (Partington and McCudden, 1992, p. 4).

To overcome the implicit racist ideologies and create a smooth functioning multicultural nation Australia has had to make three changes. First it has had to respond to the demands of the indigenous people so as to appear to transform the first major racist moment in Australian history. Second it has had to break the embedded ideology of racism in the dominant Australian population. Third it has had to support traditionalism for ethnic and Aboriginal groups so that it appears to support their cultural autonomy and social equality (Kalantzis, 1988). While these factors are part of government policy, the fact that some ethnic and Aboriginal groups remain at the bottom of most social indicators implies that the deeper influences of racism and structural inequalities remain.

Deconstruction

Deconstruction was a term used by the poststructuralist intellectual movement in the late 1960s. The term is mainly associated with Derrida (1978) who suggested that language cannot carry meaning or truth directly. He claimed that Western philosophies have used metaphor and figurative rhetoric to construct hierarchies of

meaning in which one term is constituted as the privileged term and these are then socially institutionalised, such as good/bad, black/white, masculine/feminine. The aim of deconstruction is to reveal the ambivalence of all texts which can only be understood in relation to other texts and not in relation to any literal meaning. The search for truth involves an attempt to deal with the problem of relating the realm of language and the realm of Being. Kant argued in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that there is a mis-match between reality and our perceptions of reality and it is wrong to confuse the two. Paul de Man (1986, p.11), supported this claim by arguing that what we define as an ideology is actually the confusion of linguistic with actual reality.

Structuralists such as Saussure, Gadamer and Levi-Strauss believed that a text speaks a certain truth and at some point the reader can see a remark or event which has obvious meaning. The reader must focus on the subject matter not the speaker which Derrida argues is an ethnocentric view of nature over culture.

Poststructuralists like Derrida claimed that all writing is an interpretation of previous writings and there is no one correct interpretation of a text (Hollinger, 1994, p. 98). However as Jameson argued, "history is not a text, though it is nonetheless inaccessible to us except in textual form" (cited in Milner, 1991, p. 121) The human subject does not have a unified consciousness but is structured by language (Sarup, 1989, p. 4). Therefore, in order to get at the realities behind the texts you need to deconstruct them and eliminate the interpretation or the ideology.

Discourse Theory

The striving for an identity centres on language. Language as described by Muecke (1992) is organised into categories of text, discourse and ideology. He argued that discourses are produced by ideological institutions such as religions, colonial economies and governments. Meaning and understandings are generated by these discourses so that there is coherence between institutional structures and the behaviour

of individuals within them. These discourses are realised ultimately in grammatical selections, formations and transformations and have been historically formed in relation to ideologies.

The consequence of discourse theory is that the deconstruction of texts and ideologies becomes the site of social change (Muecke 1992, Hodge and Kress 1988). Discourse theory argued against the view that language is a tool which individuals used to express ideas but rather argued that individuals are formed by language and its discourses. Muecke claimed that the way non-Aboriginal people view Aboriginal people is a result of the discourses made available.

Hollinsworth (1992b) argued that while there have been many different discourses of Aboriginality over the last 200 years, the dominant official discourse since the 1940s has been framed in terms of 'traditional' culture. This particular construction does not include urban/rural Aboriginal people and results in comparisons between those described as urban or part-Aboriginal and those considered authentic.

Non-Aboriginal people have traditionally written three main types of discourses on Aboriginal people: the Anthropological, the Romantic and the Racist (Muecke, 1992). He argued that these discourses start on perceptions of difference (us and them), and proceed to create an Anthropological, Romantic or Racist perception by the choice of grammatical features such as metaphor, sentence structure and word selection which are then read as a social perception. In the 1930s when anthropologists came to re-evaluate and reconstruct Aboriginal culture the emphasis was on "uncontaminated cultures in remote locations" and tended to ignore the majority Aboriginal population in 'settled' Australia. Hollinsworth (1992b) argued that the academic and mass media representations of Aboriginal people as changeless and primitive has made the urban Aboriginal people appear less authentic. He further claimed that the prevailing racist and colonial discourses have shaped people's construction of Aboriginality and explained why there is an increased acceptance and rise in popularity of Australia's

Aboriginal heritage and traditional arts and crafts without a significant improvement in the social and material conditions for most Aboriginal people. Nyoongar (1992) argued against Hollinsworth's claims by stating that Aboriginal people cannot be identified as one identifiable group. Aboriginal people identify with regional identifications such as Nyoongah, Koori, Yamadji etc. and believed that the search for an Aboriginal identity must come from within the Aboriginal community rather than from European theory.

Postmodernism and the School Curriculum

Postmodernism's rejection of master narratives and universalism and the emergence of popular culture has challenged the traditional academic disciplines. The postmodern condition has also meant that various forms of Otherness can now be explored and reclaimed. Giroux (1990, p. 21), summarised the impact postmodernism has on our traditional curriculum discourses as firstly, the changing conditions of knowledge embedded in electronic technology; secondly, the new questions raised about culture as a field of domination and contestation; and thirdly, the focus on the importance of history as a counter-memory in the concept of otherness, which offers the opportunity for subordinate groups to repossess their human history. This repossession was barred from the dominant historical narrative in the modernist approach.

School knowledge is the combination of skills and knowledge an individual acquires through interacting with school texts and classroom discourse (Luke and Luke 1990). Educational discourse can be seen synchronously as a system of signs and representation from the academic article to the policy document, to curriculum specifications, to staffroom common sense, and to the classroom text and student worksheet. Diachronically school knowledge can be deconstructed from its assumed status as representational of the real to an historical variant on the real. Luke and Luke (1990) argue that in the postmodern world the sign-imageries of school knowledge "have no relation to any reality whatsoever" (p. 82). They give as an example the

institutionalised reading practices of the students' oral reading, the teacher questioning of that reading, end-of-chapter quizzes, homework and formal exams which do not have an equivalence in out of school reality.

For educators, postmodernism provides theories with which to redefine authority, and the hidden ways in which we marginalise, exclude and subordinate. In this case it means providing a curriculum which encompasses individuals and groups who have been excluded due to their class, gender, race, age or ethnic origin (Giroux, 1990, p. 30). As Baker and Freebody (1989) showed in their analyses of classroom discourse, the texts of school knowledge are produced through classroom discourse which leads to micropolitical relations between teacher, student and text authority. Husseyn (1984) argued that because the nature of school knowledge with its artefacts of historically identifiable discourses such as the curriculum, educational knowledge and policy remains in an industrialist model school system, the traces of the modernist project remain. Luke and Luke (1990) maintained that part of the problem with Western education is the unquestioned acceptance of narratives from a past era.

These past narratives, transposed to contemporary local and global conditions may no longer be relevant in the formulation of inquiry or solutions. From a postmodern perspective the changing function of education not only includes changes to the curriculum but also a shift in the teachers role from teacher as teacher (which as Hinkson (1991) wrote is one who "imposes dogma, prejudice, arbitrary knowledge" (p.29)), to one who is a facilitator of knowledge. The result is that the individual becomes an autonomous learner rather than a market-based learner who can only choose knowledge broken into consumerable pieces.

History of Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal interaction

Racism against Aboriginal people has been evident from the first colonisation of Australia by the Europeans. The Constitution of 1901 not only excluded Aboriginals from federal jurisdiction but also prevented them from voting and declared them non-persons.

The "Protectionist" era from the 1860s to the 1940s was a period in which Aboriginal people were discriminated against and controlled. States made decisions about peoples' racial classification based on their degree of skin pigmentation. These classifications were significant because being Aboriginal meant being sent to reserves and forfeiting their land. Many Aboriginal people denied their roots for fear of being sent to reserves. These reserves did little to prepare Aboriginal people for white society and denied them the right to practise their own culture (Bereson and Matheson 1992). The effects of this era are still felt today. The parents of the removed children felt an acute sense of anguish and loss whereas the children suffered psychological problems as they question their identity and the value of their heritage. Tensions have been created between the generations due to the differing educational experiences and aspirations (Addressing the key issues of reconciliation, 1993, p.14).

By 1939 protectionist policies were officially abandoned and assimilation policies were adopted. These policies were formulated with the expectation that all ethnic groups including Aboriginal people would attain the same manner of living as members of a single Australian community (Hasluck, 1961). Jordan (1986) describes the assimilation period as a time when Aboriginal people were rejected by the mainstream society on account of their skin colour and life style while at the same time losing their Aboriginal identity. The result of this era was cultural genocide as Aboriginal culture and language were ignored in an attempt to assimilate them into the 'white' Australia.

In the early 1970s, forced assimilation policies were abandoned but voluntary

assimilation continued. Cultural pluralism was the new ideal and was supported through setting up the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. The aims of these policies were to encourage ethnic groups to maintain their own culture and language while taking on an 'Australian' identity or nationality (Jordan 1986). The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Wooten 1991) has found that policies and attitudes from the past and the structures and processes for 'dealing with' Aboriginal people are still found in some agencies such as the police force, courts, welfare agencies and schools.

Over the past two decades large sums of money have been utilised to alleviate the "Third World" living conditions experienced by Aboriginal people in both rural and urban areas. A report in the *West Australian* (Brown 1994) stated that while \$387 million of state money had been spent last year on Aboriginal services much of this had been wasted and conditions remain at Third World levels. As 70% of West Australian Aboriginal people are under 30 years of age there needs to be a special focus placed on early schooling, measures to combat absenteeism and a teacher training program which includes Aboriginal history and culture. The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation claimed that governments need to redistribute resources to indigenous communities themselves rather than allocating funds to government agencies. This will ensure that they receive the maximum benefit and control over the funding. As part of the reconciliation process governments at all levels are expected to cooperate and liaise with ATSIC to address Aboriginal peoples' disadvantage and aspirations in relation to land, housing, law and justice, cultural heritage, education, employment, health, infrastructure, and economic development. Non-Aboriginal Australians need to understand that the disadvantaged status of Aboriginal people is not one of their own making but is due largely to the past dispossession and economic injustices they have experienced (Brown 1994).

On an international level the racist attitudes of a small, predominantly western society

in South East Asia may have political and economic consequences. Brady (1994, p. 93) writes that with the breakdown of apartheid in South Africa, Australia may replace that country as the archetype of the racist state. International criticism has already been mentioned in Australia's delay in fully implementing the International Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination which was signed in 1975. The government still has reservations about Article 4(a) which states that the dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority, hatred or incitement to racial hatred is unlawful. The government claims this is challenging an individual's right to freedom of speech. To date South Australia, New South Wales and Western Australia have passed the legislation but according to Brady the implementation has not been enthusiastic.

While the situation for Aboriginal people is considerably more disadvantaged when compared to non-Aboriginals there have also been some successful programs and projects run by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people. Some of the programs which have been established in Western Australia are; the Aboriginal Medical Service, Abmusic, Aboriginal Legal Service, Aboriginal Visitors Scheme and the Nyungar Alcohol Substance Abuse Scheme (Daube 1994).

Racism and Ethnic Relations

The study of race and ethnic relations is concerned with the kinds of social relations which exist between people of the same race and ethnicity and between individuals and groups of different race and ethnicity. In the field of sociology there many of theories and concepts which attempt to interpret the problem of order in modern society such as the structural-functionalist approach of Talcott Parsons (1952), Marxist conflict theory, rational choice theory and methodological individualism (Rex, 1986).

Racism is often confused with prejudice, discrimination and other hostile acts perpetrated by an individual. Prejudice as defined by Lynch (1987, p. 22), "is the

holding of a belief or opinion without adequate rational grounds or in the face of rational evidence to the contrary of that belief or opinion". Prejudice as such may be for or against a person or object and is not directly antagonistic. Discrimination refers to the behaviour of an individual based on their prejudiced beliefs and may be verbal or non-verbal, individual or institutional, conscious or unconscious (Lynch 1987). Racial discrimination refers to the behaviour which disadvantages others based on their believed membership to a certain racial or ethnic group (Pettman 1986).

Racism needs to be distinguished from racial discrimination. Racism as explained by Pettman (1986), is an ideology which devalues others and explains their inferiority in ways that blame the victim. Thus it rationalises the dominant group's prejudice and becomes so entrenched in the population's consciousness that it comes to be seen as a natural belief and operates through the institutions of that society.

Institutional racism refers to the consequences of a society's racist beliefs, which is the distribution of social rewards in a way that regularly advantages some groups (usually male, middle-class, Anglo-Australians) and disadvantages others. The dominant group is represented in positions of power so that their interests and values are maintained. The pattern of domination emerges through school and university outcomes and employment levels. Key institutions such as education, the law, health and government administration exhibit institutional racism. This process is largely unconscious and develops through socialisation into a prejudiced culture without examining how discriminated groups are affected (Pettman 1988; Sarup 1986).

Racism is evident at both the institutional and individual level. These two levels are interconnected due to the way society constructs and maintains social integration and attitudes through its key institutions. The forms of social integration in a society are multiple and multi-layered and can be seen explicitly and implicitly. It is the implicit and apparently natural racist practices which are the most powerful (Hinkson 1991).

In the modernist state the system of work and education were important institutions for the socialisation of its citizens. The function of school is to distribute knowledge in order for the individual to acquire specific roles in society. Despite the fact that teachers hold diverse views, in the main the teacher's role is to formally transmit specific knowledge within the confines of the institution which the teacher represents. As the teacher usually belongs to the dominant group in society then this group's knowledge, beliefs and attitudes are also transmitted either consciously or unconsciously. Thus racism is sustained because it reinforces the privileges of the dominant group and the inequality of the less powerful groups in society (Hinkson 1991).

In postmodernity the integrative aspect of education is less important because new social integrative mechanisms have emerged such as the mass media. The consumer culture which the mass media has created has led to a situation where each individual is socially integrated and increasingly constitutes a self which takes the consumer culture for granted (Hinkson 1991).

Education in a Multicultural Society

Schooling in Australia is a compulsory, universal experience and because of this becomes a reflection as well as a reflector of the processes of socialisation. Kalantzis (1988) argued that in schools there is a token acknowledgment of other cultures. Culture and ethnicity are recognised in the narrow perspective of people's personal preferences for food, religion and music. There is a reluctance to address the deeper structural issues of racism. The pedagogical changes required to combat structural racism such as underachievement at school of Aboriginal and ethnic people are largely ignored.

The type of action required to eliminate racism according to Kalantzis involves learning language as a tool for communication, action, power and self-determination.

Traditionally education has relied on the printed word for transmission of information. Goody and Watt (1977) argue that the fixity of the printed word has shaped history and protected the past through its documentary record which they refer to as the 'tyranny of history'. Post modernists such as Derrida would argue that learning language also involves the ability to analyse discourses in order to deconstruct their hidden meaning and get to the reality. The emphasis in teacher training should be on the pedagogical imperatives of postmodern industrial societies as they relate to people from all backgrounds. Materials and curriculum should not just remove stereotyping and widen ethnic representation but develop programmes which enable all students to understand the process of cultural construction.

Aboriginal Students and Schools

Within the context of Australian education, Aboriginal students' educational achievement is well below that of non-Aboriginal students. Despite initiatives such as extra funding, bilingual programmes, pre-school meals programmes, employment of Aboriginal education workers and liaison officers, Aboriginal children continue to perform poorly at school and have the lowest retention rate of any group in Australia (McInerney 1992).

An article in *The Weekend Australian* (26/2/94,) titled 'Education fails Black Children' claimed that nearly half the nation's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary school children have serious numeracy and literacy problems. This is three times the national average. The report also stated that one in five Aboriginal children are not enrolled in any kind of formal education and that one in four leave school before the end of year ten.

The *Task Force on Aboriginal Social Justice* (1994) on which the above article was based, argued that a person's level of academic achievement had a direct influence on other aspects of his/her life such as employment, health, housing and general well

being and vice versa. This means that in order for educational achievements to improve there was a need for social justice for all Aboriginal people. The report claimed that some of the factors which were causing low academic achievement were cultural conflict, the poor education of parents and grandparents and the irrelevance and inappropriateness of the State education system. This was reflected in the high levels of non-attendance and truancy, low retention rates and the unequal levels of achievement compared with non-Aboriginals. While these factors are common to other students of a lower socio-economic background the culturally alien environment, lack of culturally appropriate programs and prejudiced attitudes towards Aboriginal students among peers and some teaching staff further compound the problem.

The attitudes of non-Aboriginal students towards Aboriginals was one of the issues mentioned in *The Task Force on Aboriginal Social Justice* (1994). Most Aboriginal people live in areas where they form a minority group. Therefore in the majority of schools Aboriginal students comprise a minority of the student population. In the report the Aboriginal community claimed that the low retention rates of Aboriginal students were due to their sense of alienation from mainstream society and the existence of prejudicial attitudes and discrimination by peers and some teachers produced low self-esteem and low academic aspirations in Aboriginal students.

The WAAECG (1987) was established to advise on the educational needs of Aboriginal people. Part of their findings was that there was a popular misconception that Aboriginal people were either completely assimilated into the 'white' culture or maintained a traditional lifestyle which forfeited their right to participate in mainstream society. This misconception has had an adverse effect on the delivery of education to Aboriginal children. The dominant modes of discourse in the schools are counter to Aboriginal children's success. Non-Aboriginal people need to recognise that through education Aboriginal people seek equality and independence not cultural genocide. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (1993) further

stated that it is only through an equitable education that economic and social disadvantage will be rectified and enable Aboriginals to achieve full recognition and status within Australia.

Teacher Attitude and its Effect on Students Performance

A number of studies have been conducted on the effect of teacher attitudes on students' academic performance. For a variety of reasons teachers form differential expectations for the students they teach (Good & Brophy, 1974; Rosenthal & Jacobsen, 1968) and that such expectations influences teacher behaviours. While the initial Rosenthal & Jacobsen (1968) study has been strongly criticised (Thorndike, 1968; Greiger, 1971) it sparked off numerous teacher expectation studies in the following decades. With regard to ethnic minority students a number of studies have been conducted both in Australia and overseas. McInerney (1992) stated that for a variety of reasons many teachers set low expectations of Aboriginal students academic performance. In New Zealand (St George, 1983; Dewes, 1968; Walker, 1973) one of the causes for the low achievement of minority school children was found to be the biases of the teachers and school system. A parallel is to be found in the United States where low performance expectations and assumptions were attributed to the educational neglect of minority groups (Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited, 1965; Katz, 1967; Jensen & Rosenfeld, 1974; Cooper, Baron & Lowe, 1975; Clifton, 1982).

The present research shows that teacher support and encouragement is one of the most important determinants of Aboriginal motivation in the school setting. McInerney (1992) found that the main factors which motivate an urban Aboriginal child to continue at school was firstly a sense of self-reliance and goal direction. These were influenced by facilitating conditions such as parental support, school support through teachers and peers and a feeling of like or dislike towards school in general. Malin (1990) supports this claim by asserting that the culturally based skills, assumptions

and values which the Aboriginal child brings from home to school often go unnoticed by the non-Aboriginal teacher. The study showed that the Aboriginal children were only noticed by the teacher for 'doing the wrong thing'. She claimed that the combination of cultural differences, ideology and micro-political processes resulted in Aboriginal children being marginalised both socially and academically.

Teacher attitudes towards indigenous children is largely a result of their socialisation. Andrews (1993) found that teachers are formed by their own experiences at school and that teacher training institutions are an extension of this period of socialisation. These experiences are largely formed by a non-indigenous, western, capitalist society which does not cater for teaching in a cross-cultural situation.

Cultural Differences of Aboriginal Students

Aboriginal people who have not lived a traditional lifestyle for generations may still continue the cultural characteristics typical of traditional lifestyles because their childrearing practices have not changed markedly. These practices are different to non-Aboriginal children and can influence the ways in which Aboriginal children interact in the classroom and respond to teachers. Kearins (1984) has identified significant differences in child-rearing practices in Australia between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Malin (1990) and Harris (1987) have found that urban Aboriginal children continue to show these characteristics.

One of the main characteristics of Aboriginal children is that they are autonomous. This can be seen in the extent to which they regulate their own behaviour and show self-reliance. Aboriginal children are brought up to be independent in behaviour and decision making. For example they have free access to the resources of the household such as food. They can choose rather than feel compelled to comply to adult directives and parents do not question their children about their behaviour such as: Where are you going? Why are you doing that?

you going? Why are you doing that?

Aboriginal parents also expect their children to be self-reliant. They are brought up to assert themselves and defend their rights. They are expected to solve their own arguments rather than running to the adults. They are also expected to be emotionally resilient and be physically tough.

There is more social equality between Aboriginal adults and children than with non-Aboriginal children. They are treated more as equal partners and are given more responsibility such as looking after younger siblings.

Close family ties are a characteristic of Aboriginal people. People who are willing to spend the time of day to discuss common interests, have an interest in relationships and demonstrate care are held in higher regard than people who are more work oriented. Aboriginal people are expected to visit family regularly, stay overnight or for lengthy periods, have a good knowledge of relationships and care for one another.

Harris (1987) has researched how these child-rearing practices are extended into how Aboriginal children learn. The main characteristics of Aboriginal learning styles are that they learn through observation and imitation rather than verbal instruction. They prefer to learn through trial and error in private so they are competent before performing in practice. They also learn when the task is for a real life performance within a relevant context rather than in a contrived context free setting. Aboriginal children also tend to be more person oriented than information oriented and work better in a cooperative environment rather than a competitive one.

The implications of the differences in child rearing practices and learning styles is that Aboriginal children will be disadvantaged when they go to school. As Malin (1990) found in her study, non-Aboriginal children have decisions made for them by adults,

and are trained to obey adults and to heed verbal instructions before they attend school. Young Aboriginal children are required to make decisions rather than be directed by adults. They are not expected to obey nor attend to verbal instructions by adults but are free to act independently.

Teachers who are mainly non-Aboriginal expect students to share the same 'normal' behaviours as their own upbringing. As young Aboriginal children do not share the same language usage, assumptions and information their behaviour in schools is often judged as ignorant and disobedient. Their own skills and knowledge are often unrecognised and so are the conflicts they experience within the school system (Malin, 1990; Gibson, 1993).

Specific Studies similar to the Current Study

There have been a number of studies which look at Aboriginal performance, motivation and attitudes towards schooling but very few studies have been done to assess the extent of racism in the schools. Jordan (1986) found that schools try to create a positive self-concept for all its students but Aboriginal people have to contend with the ingrained racism from the wider society which they face in their day to day interactions. The following recent studies have interviewed parents and students on how they perceive education and the issues which affect them. These reports found that racism is a significant issue which affected their performance at school.

A survey undertaken in Darwin shows racism to be a major factor affecting Aboriginal children at school. Wunungmurra (1987) interviewed seven parents on how they felt about sending their children to urban primary schools. The results indicated that the most common problem was teasing. Other problems included shyness, loneliness, and feeling frightened. The parents also stated that their children felt more contented at a school when the principals and teachers understood Aboriginal culture. The concluding comment was that often absenteeism was due to teasing and difficulties

with school work. The survey was a small study and more research needs to be done to see if racism is a significant factor across settings.

Forrester (1992) conducted a survey of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in upper primary, secondary and tertiary education to determine the extent of both overt and covert discriminatory practices operating in the education system. The responses from the questionnaire indicated that overt racist behaviour and attitudes seem to peak in early and middle high school and develop into more covert practices from then on. These studies as well as the various government reports mentioned previously all indicate that racism is a reality for Aboriginal children in schools and is a major reason for failure at school and alienation from the education system.

McInerney (1989) studied the determinants of motivation of urban Aboriginal students within a mainstream school setting. A comparative study was made of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal views on education. The major purpose of the study was to generate qualitative information on how Aboriginal people conceptualise education, and what they perceive to be the main issues concerning the performance of Aboriginal children at school. These data were compared with responses made by non-Aboriginal parents relating to their own children. The survey was carried out through personal interviews and group discussions with members of the Aboriginal community in five educational regions of the New South Wales Department of Education and through a written survey form distributed to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents.

The results of the survey indicated that racism and discrimination are significant factors affecting school success and school-related behaviour. The Aboriginal parents' responses showed that they considered school-based education important for their children, and children should continue beyond the minimum school age. Factors which they attributed to leaving school early were peer group pressure, poor teaching methods, insensitive teachers, inappropriate school curriculum and the discriminatory

behaviour of schools for not giving enough attention to Aboriginal students. A wide range of issues were addressed in this study such as goal direction, self-reliance and confidence, intrinsic motivation, parental support, teacher and peer support and the perceived value of schooling. Racism was only one issue which was examined but the fact that a high proportion of Aboriginal parents stated that it was affecting school performance indicates that racism is present in school and is worthy of investigation. For this reason the present study was conducted to examine the nature and extent of racism in urban primary schools and whether this has a significant effect on urban Aboriginal student's performance at school.

Literature on Methodology: Case Study Method

The case-study method is the in-depth investigation of an individual, group or institution. The purpose of this method is to examine factors and the relationship between factors that have led to a current behaviour or situation which is the object of the study (Gay 1992).

Racism is an issue which involves complex personal and social components. The best method to analyse all these components is the case study as qualitative studies provide a better fit to most social phenomena than rationalistic methods. The main argument for using this approach is that when dealing with human enquiry it is impossible to eliminate interaction between the inquirer and the respondent and therefore it should be used as the instrument of enquiry. This is because human life cannot be reduced to objective facts and in order to explore events in human life it has to be done by recreating the experiences of others (Guba 1988).

Postmodern researchers are not limited by what they believe is rational. Murphy (1989) describes this principle as "semiotic polycentrism", which is the belief that phenomena may possess a variety of meanings simultaneously. The idea that there is

a final reading of a text is rejected. Reality is recognised to be multivalent as opposed to the condition maintained by structuralists in which reality is based on empirical facts.

The instrumental case-study method allows the inquirer to organise social data in order to determine the factors, and relationships among the factors, which have resulted in the current situation (Gay 1992). The purpose of the case-study is to determine why the particular situation has arisen rather than what is happening in the present. The choice of the case is to provide insight and advance our understanding of the issue of racism. The case will be looked at in depth, its contexts and activities detailed to gain an understanding of the processes and to suggest hypotheses to account for the situation (Stake 1988).

The instrumental case-study method has been used to examine various issues in education across cultural settings. To understand education in a cross-cultural setting the inquirer must be familiar with the culture in order to formulate generalisations about the relationship between schools and communities as well as education and social systems. In case studies such as Corrigan (1979), *Schooling the Smash Street Kids*; Robins and Cohen (1978), *Knuckle Sandwich: Growing up in the Working-Class City*; Hebdige (1979), *Sub-culture: The meaning of Style* and Willis (1979), *Learning to labour: How Working Class Kids get Working Class Jobs*; the inquirer were able to examine the interaction between the people engaged in the education process and gain personal insights into problems which are difficult to investigate using more rationalistic methods.

Rationalistic methods rely on objective descriptions and observations as a means for gathering and analysing data. Critical researchers maintain that the meaning of an experience is not self-evident but depends on the interpretation and definition of the experience. Kincheloe (cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 144) argues that the

analysis and interpretation of data depends on the theoretical framework and the researchers own ideological assumptions. The data derived from a study are not irrefutable facts but represent hidden assumptions which the inquirer must reveal. Knowledge about the world is revealed by people who are a part of that world and this involves an act of human judgement. From a postmodern perspective this act of judgement is an interpretive act. The interpretation of theory, according to critical analysts, involves understanding the relationship between the particular and the whole and between the subject and the object of analysis. This position contradicts the empirical viewpoint that theory is basically a matter of classifying objective data (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994).

The case-study method is particularly relevant when dealing with Aboriginal people. The WAAECG (1987) stated that surveys of Aboriginal people which involve structured questionnaires often appear threatening and result in invalid conclusions. The best approach is to meet with people on their own terms and to follow a general framework of questioning so as to gain rapport and the confidence of the respondents. Aboriginal people in urban and other non-traditional settings have reason to suspect academic researchers (particularly if they are not Aboriginal), either as using information for self-promotion or as state-funded and possibly state-directed workers who will misuse the information or suppress it. This leads Aboriginal people to question why they should cooperate for no return. To prevent the case of misrepresentation the inquirer will adopt the case-study method to allow the respondents to speak for themselves.

A critical postmodern inquirer is required to ask questions about how what has come to be, whose interests are served by particular institutional arrangements, and where our own frames of references come from. To engage in critical postmodern research is to construct perceptions of the world in a manner which undermines what appears natural and question what appears obvious so that local subjugated knowledge can

challenge universal knowledge (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

From a postmodern perspective, Australian post-colonial society consists of individuals from different cultures who are shaped by the various discourses, images and texts with which they interact. Their interpretation of these texts will influence and shape their perceptions of society.

Since the British colonised Australia they have become the dominant culture and have created the "grand narratives" which shape the reality and concepts held by individuals. Because of this, other ethnic groups "narratives" have become excluded and devalued. Since 1972 government policy has changed from assimilation and segregation policies to cultural pluralism. As a result the individual now lives in a space capable of supporting cultural diversity where previously there was a belief that a nation could have only one national identity to which outsiders had to be assimilated. However these changes in government policy are not being translated into reality because the "grand narratives" from the modernist era still remain in effect through the major socialising institutions such as education, the media, the judicial system and politics. Lyotard (1984) argues against these macro theories (Newtonian, Hegelian, Marxian, Weberian) in favour of a plurality of language games, of localised knowledge or "little narratives".

The "grand narratives" according to Foucault (1972) are a form of social power because the use of a particular language and its associated ideas creates social outcomes which go beyond simply describing the world. Derrida (1978) claims that language is an unstable medium which cannot carry truth or meaning directly. He drew attention to the ways in which Western philosophy has constructed hierarchies of meaning which are then socially institutionalised such as black/white, male/female, science/art. The task of deconstruction is to show that texts need to be considered in relation to other texts and the context, time and space in which they were written. Derrida argues that social institutions maintain their power by the use of certain

narratives to the exclusion of others.

Postmodern society is also characterised by a new social space in which the media and information technology have reconstituted citizens into a new global awareness (Lyotard 1984; Baudrillard 1981; Hinkson 1991). The forms of communication this world now supports such as the computer, the satellite, video clips and the fax has meant cultural lifestyle has become more diverse. The mass media through its medium of image, particularly in advertising, also plays a role in creating images which the individual perceives and internalises (Hinkson 1991).

Since the colonisation of Australia Aboriginal people have been excluded from the mainstream culture. Various government policies have attempted to destroy Aboriginal culture and language by genocide, segregation and assimilation. Even though the present government policy is one of cultural pluralism Aboriginal people still remain at the bottom of most social indicators, are stereotyped and subject to racism to a large extent in their lives. Their own culture, language and past experiences are mostly unrecognised by the dominant culture.

Schools play a major role in determining the "reality" of its students because it is responsible for their knowledge and skills. In a postmodern era with the discourses of the mass media and technology impacting on society, the sign-imageries of school knowledge have no relation to reality. School knowledge has been socially constructed at the levels of text construction, classroom distribution and evaluation. The curricular design and teacher intent may have little to do with what the student actually learns from the teaching event. Particularly when the student is from a different cultural background to the teacher and does not possess the same cultural signs, images and perceptions. Schools appear to be operating from a modernist perspective in the way that the "grand narratives" from the past are maintained. The current discourses remain Eurocentric and serve to maintain the social order. It is

argued that for schooling to become truly multicultural then the frameworks from the past era need to be transposed to contemporary local and global conditions. The narratives from the past are no longer relevant in the formulation of inquiry or solutions. These past narratives have no correspondence to the domain of the outside world and serve to maintain a modernist perspective.

Australian Aboriginal children continue to be disadvantaged with regard to academic achievement and school retention. In the past the reasons given were from a deficit point of view. That is the minority group's poor performance was explained by either lack of innate ability, inappropriate cognitive or learning styles or poor academic motivation rather than looking at the inadequacies of the schooling system itself which fails to take into account the particular needs and strengths of minority group children. In a postmodern world it is no longer acceptable to impose one culture's "grand narratives" on to another. By making the "little narratives" known to the dominant group and deconstructing the "grand narratives" from the past there is a chance that the inequities of minority groups can be addressed. For this reason the present study will interview Aboriginal parents about their perceptions of schooling for their children. By examining the situation from their perspective it will be possible to see what factors they feel are impeding their child's progress at school. Their experiences at school will also be compared to see what effect this has had on their lives and to see how much progress schools have made in the last twenty years. As racism is a "reality" for most Aboriginal people this study will also look at how Aboriginal parents define and describe racism and how they prepare their children to deal with it.

METHOD

Participants

For the purpose of this study seven Aboriginal parents with children attending urban primary schools were interviewed. The participants were chosen by making personal contact with them either through an AEW at an urban primary school or through personal contacts of the inquirer. As the focus of attention is on the particular group chosen and not the whole population there is no need to ensure the group is representative of the population.

Data Collection

Data was collected by conducting personal interviews with the seven Aboriginal parents. The participants were interviewed for approximately one hour and their responses recorded on tape. These sessions were conducted mostly singly, except for a brother and sister who were interviewed together. Rapport and trust between the interviewer and the respondent needed to be developed as a lot of what the respondents related was personal and related to issues which were sensitive. For this reason the interviews were carried out in an environment which was as non-threatening as possible to the respondents such as in their homes or workplaces.

A basic set of questions was asked of respondents. These are listed in appendix 1. These questions were derived from the literature review which indicated the need for further research on Aboriginal parents perceptions of schooling for their children. The form of interviewing was open ended questions which were in response to the issues raised by the respondent. Responses to these questions were analysed and subsequent interviews were conducted to clarify any points raised by the respondent.

Instruments

The instruments used in this research were tape recorded interview sessions. The interviews were transcribed and the transcripts returned to participants who were

asked to confirm the results of the interviews.

Ethical Considerations

All respondents were truthfully informed by letter about the research and their written consent obtained before collecting data. To protect their privacy all respondents' identities are concealed and they are referred to throughout the study by pseudonyms.

During data collection respondents were informed when a session was being recorded and they were given the right to cease recording at any time. All participants allowed the interviews to be used with only minor corrections.

It is the ethical responsibility of researchers to ensure that minority groups are not categorised, that negative stereotypes are not reinforced and their humanity devalued as a result of the research. The use of interviewing as a technique was aimed to treat the respondents as individuals rather than objects or numbers. This was done by carefully analysing the situation and reporting as through the eyes of the respondent with "verbatim" transcripts of related incidents to depict a point. By representing the Aboriginal respondents as visible and vocal they were empowered to relate their version of events rather than the construction of knowledge being dependent on the researchers point of view.

Analysis

The first step in data analysis was to define the case and its characteristics. In this instance the case was the group of Aboriginal respondents and they were described in the following contexts;

1. the nature of the case
2. their historical background
3. the physical setting

4. other contextual factors pertaining to the case such as economic situation and educational qualifications. This information enabled the inquirer to examine the complexities of the case and relate it to a postmodern perspective.

The coding and linking of the data were analysed with a qualitative data analysis software package entitled NUDIST which stands for Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising. It is a computer package designed to handle text-based data in qualitative analysis by supporting processes of indexing, searching and theorising. This data base enables the inquirer to manage, describe and explore complex unstructured data whilst also developing new ideas and theories. In this case the raw data were introduced into NUDIST and the inquirer then created an index database. The categories for this data base were coded according to the responses to the questions and fell under seven main headings;

1. Base Data
2. Parents' Experiences at School
3. Interactions
4. Explanations of Racism
5. Consequences of Interactions
6. Preparations
7. Definitions of Racism

These main categories were used to code all the concepts which were raised in each of the interviews. A flexible tree-structured index system of categories and subcategories was thus created by relating data documents to index references which were linked and ordered. As the documents were studied and explored ideas emerged. Notes and memos were made about these developing ideas and theories. This method allowed the inquirer to develop theories by examining how these categories and subcategories are linked and examining whether there were any theoretical patterns emerging.

As the study involved small, detailed accounts of a few cases the main analysis was of text indexed at a particular node. The results of these searches were examined and any relevant data was stored as a report. These reports showed the percentage of parents who gave similar responses and how these responses were linked to other nodes. This information enabled the inquirer to identify the types of responses and establish whether there was a common thread of experience between the respondents. These responses were then analysed and discussed in the following section.

FINDINGS

A Brief Description of the Participants

(All personal names and schools mentioned in this thesis are fictitious)

The following section will briefly describe some of the parents experiences they had when they were at school. These experiences will give the reader an insight into what conditions were like for Aboriginal people in the past and how these conditions have influenced their perceptions of what school is like for their children now.

Theresa Wilson

Theresa is the youngest daughter of a family of eight children who lived in the country north of Perth. Theresa was taken away from her parents by Native Welfare in the 1970s because they said her parents were too poor to look after the children. Her parents became alcoholics because Theresa said that was the only way they could cope with the hopelessness of their situation. She was raised in a Catholic Mission in WA. She said that there was a lot of racism between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children at the primary school and she still feels emotionally scarred by the abuse she suffered at the time. She attended a country high school in which she was the only Aboriginal student. During her time at school she was rarely allowed to see her parents and they both died before she could be fully reunited with them. Theresa left school at the age of fifteen.

Theresa now works full-time as an AEW at an urban primary school which has an Aboriginal student population of approximately 14.3% of the total student population. She is the mother of three children. John, 14 years; Clare, 12 years and Mary 10 years. The two younger children attend the same primary school at which Theresa works.

Theresa was interviewed at school

Linda McDonald

Linda was born on a mission in the Eastern States in 1958 and grew up with her parents on a reserve. Her parents were moved from their tribal areas to the reserve where they lost their Aboriginal names and were not allowed to speak their language. If they were caught speaking their dialect they would be flogged. She describes her time at school as awful and full of fear of the Native Welfare Department. She went to school only because if she didn't "the Welfare" would come and take her away to a home in the city which they had already done to her sister for missing a few days of school. She said that while she was at school she was very quiet and often the teachers made her feel inhuman because she was often dirty, had no shoes and was always being called names. She said they were poor because there was no Social Security and they survived by catching kangaroos, emus and rabbits. Often they were starving and had scabies and sores. Despite this treatment Linda did well at school and was always the top of the class. She attended school until the age of fourteen. She said she left because of the attitude of the principal who wrongly accused her of laughing at him and told her to leave school.

Linda now works full-time as an AEW at an urban primary school which has an Aboriginal student population of approximately 10% of the total student population. She is the mother of three children. Donald aged 16, Alison 14 years and Simon 8 years. The younger son attends the same school that Linda works at.

Linda was interviewed at school

Walter Jones

Walter grew up in a country district of Western Australia. He attended the local high school until the age of 15. He said there was a large Aboriginal student population at the high school and there was always friction between the Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal students. He said the teacher's attitude towards Aboriginal students was really bad at that time. They thought all Aboriginal students were low achievers and

put him into remedial and basic classes with all the other Aboriginal students without formally assessing them or allowing them to try the higher grades. He said there were always big fights at lunch time between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and the teachers lacked any power or authority to break them up. Walter said he would get the cane or detention almost every day for speaking up and defending himself if he felt he was being picked on for being Aboriginal. He went to college in Perth at a later date where he completed his TEE. He is now in his third year of study to be a teacher which he is completing part-time as well as working part-time.

He is the father of five children. Fred aged 17, Frank aged 14, John aged 12, Tim aged 10 and Kate 6. The 10 year old boy attends a special school for the learning impaired. The 6 and 10 year old attend a local primary school which has an Aboriginal population of approximately 0.9% of the total student population.

Walter was interviewed at university.

Lisa Martin

Lisa grew up in a country town in Western Australia. She lived with her family until the age of 14 when she elected to go and live with a non-Aboriginal family in order to have a more stable environment to complete her schooling. During this time she kept in contact with her own family. Lisa said that she mixed well with all children at school and in one town she was friends with the policeman's daughter. She would go and visit her dad in the lock-up when she went to visit her friend and the girl would reassure her that they were feeding her dad well. She finished school at the age of fifteen and went on to complete an apprenticeship in hair-dressing. She felt that she could have done better at school and even though she got really good school reports she was streamlined into a commercial class and was not given the encouragement or opportunity to go on to year twelve and higher education.

Lisa is now an ALO for an area in Perth which is a low socio-economic area and has a

large proportion of Aboriginal families. She is the mother of four children. Elizabeth aged 16, Marie aged 15, Cherie aged 12 and Della aged 4. The 12 year old attends an urban primary school which has an Aboriginal population of approximately 11% of the total student population.

Lisa was interviewed in her office.

Gabrielle Smith

Gabrielle grew up on a reserve in the South West of Western Australia. Her mother died when she was seven and she was brought up mainly by her older sister as her father was away shearing most of the time. She said it was always the Nyoongar students who got the cane and she used to get the cane every day for coming back late to school from lunch. She said she was late because they were too poor to bring or buy their lunch at school and had to race home to the reserve for lunch which was about fifteen minutes run away. She felt that the teachers did not show her any compassion when her mother died. She was left out of the school plays because she was unable to make the costumes. When she went to visit non-Aboriginal friends after school she was not allowed in their home but had to play outside. She was not allowed to bring people back to the reserve and she often had to steal things like socks and shoes because they were so poor. She said that she could never sleep over at her friend's house because she did not own pyjamas or a toothbrush.

Gabrielle left school at the age of fourteen because she hated the attitude of the teachers. She said they never spent time to teach her at her level of understanding and often threw things at her in class and called her a dunce in front of the other children in the class. Native Welfare found her domestic work on a farm in another town.

Gabrielle said her experiences on the farm were terrible. She was not allowed to sleep inside the house but had to sleep on the verandah with the farm dogs. The family never spoke kindly to her and she was not allowed to eat with them. She worked on

the farm for about one year before quitting and returning to her family.

She says that she felt she could have done much better at school if she was encouraged more by the teacher and wished she could have bettered her life.

Gabrielle now lives in Perth. She has three adult daughters aged 28, 27 and 26. Her youngest daughter was taken by the Native Welfare as a baby and raised by a European family even though she begged them not to take her. Gabrielle also has a foster daughter, Debra aged 10 who she has looked after for the past eight years. Debra attends an urban primary school which has an Aboriginal population of approximately 1.5% of the total student population.

Gabrielle was interviewed in her home.

Mary Pound

Mary was born in a country area in the north of Western Australia and then moved to the south west where she did most of her schooling. She finished school at the age of fifteen. Mary said that while she was at school she often got a hiding for not being able to do her school work. She said that she had some non-Aboriginal friends but they sometimes would turn and call her names. She said that her mother always encouraged her to be friendly to everyone regardless of their colour but not all children felt the same way towards her. She now works one day a week at the local primary school as an AEW as well as selling her paintings at a local tourist centre. She lives in a small country town about an hour from Perth.

Mary is the mother of four children. Richard aged 10, Catherine aged 9, John aged 7 and James aged 5. The three eldest attend primary school which has an Aboriginal population of approximately 4%.

Mary was interviewed in her home with her brother Tony.

Tony Master

Tony was born in the north of Western Australia and lived most of his life in northern country towns before attending college in Perth at the age of fifteen. Tony said that when he was at school he often got a hiding from principals and teachers even for minor things like not having his collar turned down. He mixed with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students but said that the non-Aboriginal students also sometimes were enemies.

Tony has worked as an AEW and an ALO in Perth for the past three years and is the father of twins who attend a pre-primary school in Perth.

Tony is currently unemployed and lives in the same town near his sister.

These parents all share similar experiences despite coming from different areas across Australia. Their school years were spent in poverty, they suffered racial abuse both at an individual and an institutional level and all left school at an early age. All the parents have now gone on to further education and are attempting to improve their situation for themselves and their children. They are remarkably tolerant of a system which has been prejudiced and all state that they teach their children to be tolerant to all people regardless of their race. The fact that these parents agreed to be interviewed indicates that they are attempting to reconcile the past injustices and improve the tolerance and understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Many of these parents have worked in the schooling system and so are more familiar with dealing with non-Aboriginal people than the majority of Aboriginal people. From the past experiences related to me by these parents it is little wonder that the majority of Aboriginal parents feel mistrustful of the present schooling system and resist

becoming actively involved.

The next section will examine the extent of racism against primary school aged children as perceived by their parents. These results need to be considered in the light of their own experiences and perceptions of schooling compared to their children. Where relevant these will be compared and discussed.

The Extent of Racism against Primary School Aged Aboriginal Children as perceived by their Parents

To find out the extent and type of racist incidents Aboriginal children experienced, their parents were asked how their children got on with other children and teachers at school. They were also asked to relate any specific incidents they could recall and these responses were coded as either positive or negative interactions. The number of negative interactions that parents could recall far outweighed the number of positive interactions. This may be due to the fact that the negative incidents are more easily recalled than positive ones. It is not in the scope of this study to quantify the interactions however the fact that all parents could easily recall negative incidents indicates that Aboriginal children are still subject to racism in their lives on a regular basis.

Negative Interactions

Negative interactions were classified as the types of interactions Aboriginal children experienced which were unpleasant to them. These interactions occurred between Aboriginal children and other children at school, teachers, principals and the parents of non-Aboriginal children. Negative interactions which Aboriginal children experienced with other children included name calling, teasing, bullying and fighting. Negative interactions with teachers were classified as those in which the child was picked on in the classroom, punished or blamed incorrectly for perceived wrong-doings, not allowed to express their version of events or in which the child was not believed by teachers and/or principals. These interactions will be described and discussed in the

following passages to illustrate the extent of racism which primary school aged Aboriginal children experience as perceived by their parents.

Negative Interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Children

All of the parents interviewed could recall racist incidents between their children and other children both at school and after school. The types of racist incidents included name calling, bullying, stereotyping and fighting.

Name calling appeared to be a common occurrence towards Aboriginal children.

Every family had at least one child who had been called names such as, "boong", "coon" or "nigger". This occurred at both primary school and high school.

Aboriginal children tended to react to name calling in two ways. They would either ignore it or they would fight. Linda explained how Aboriginal children feel when they are called names,

Look those kids (Aboriginal) will probably get kicked, swear at them, anything else but as soon as they start saying 'boongs', 'coons'. The two worse things you can call an Aboriginal person are those two words. These kids will just fly off the handle.

Walter believes that racial incidents are rare in the early years of schooling but as the child gets to year four or five the name calling and bullying become more overt. As Walter says,

The thing is that as the years go on at school they (Aboriginal children) become more defensive to the point where they react and respond to the point of physical contact, a smack in the mouth and that sort of thing.

Aboriginal children are brought up to be self-reliant (Malin 1990) They are expected to be assertive and defend what they perceive to be their rights. They are not encouraged to run to adults to resolve their arguments and they are expected to be

emotionally resilient and physically tough. In each of the cases mentioned in the following paragraphs the children appear to be reacting to the racist taunts in the way that they have been brought up. They deal with the situation without consulting adults and their parents expect them to do this as is indicated by their responses. When Aboriginal children are at school they find themselves in conflict between two cultures. Teachers expect all children to obey the school rules in such matters as fighting and swearing and do not allow students to solve disputes themselves. If an Aboriginal child is teased he or she is expected to inform a teacher who will then deal with the situation. This is in direct contrast to how they are taught to deal with the situation at home and may be why fighting between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children is so common.

The following paragraphs describe further incidents of name calling and fighting and also describes how most Aboriginal parents feel that racism in non-Aboriginal children comes from the attitude of their parents.

According to Aboriginal parents, some non-Aboriginal children hold prejudiced views of Aboriginal children and they state these views in the classroom. Walter's account of such occurrences is typical of the views of Aboriginal parents:

They were sitting in the classroom and they came to Social Studies, "Living in a Harsh Environment". They were looking at Aboriginal people and how they survived and all that. Kevin put up his hand and said, "they should have shot em". And so my son said, "Why's that?" Kevin replied, "They cause a lot of trouble, they steal cars, they wreck houses". My son replied, "Not everyone is like that. I don't steal cars, I don't wreck houses. Kevin replied, "Yeah, it will only be a matter of time, won't it?" I think Kevin got real personal and my son went up and smacked him in the chops.

After this episode Kevin, and Walter's son John, met the following weekend on the football field. The feelings of animosity between them continued particularly as they

were playing against each other. Whenever John tried to kick goals Kevin taunted him with names such as, "nigger", "black boy", and "you smell". John eventually got sick of this and ended up hitting him. Kevin's father and Walter went out on the field to sort out the situation. Kevin's father began to tell John off for hitting his son before finding out why he did it. When John tried to explain what happened Kevin's father would not listen and continued to support his son. It was not only the non-Aboriginal parents who supported Kevin but also the umpire who said that if it happens again John will be sent off. Walter said he felt really upset and angry because they would not listen to their side of the story.

This is similar to many of the incidents at school between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children which the parents have talked about. While the teachers are prepared to consider the non-Aboriginal childrens' version of events, the version of the Aboriginal children and their parents are not considered or believed. This is a racist assumption that Aboriginal people cannot be trusted or believed.

For example, Theresa's son was involved in an incident in which he was sworn at and teased after school. While he didn't fight, his friend who was more aggressive did. The outcome was that the Aboriginal boys were suspended for fighting while the boy who instigated the affair by name calling did not received no punishment.

Mary, Walter and Lisa all felt the racist attitudes of some children came from the attitude of the parents. Walter directly observed the attitude of the father towards his son on the football field and he said "from the attitude of the father that was definitely where it all came from", referring to Kevin's racist comments. Lisa also stated that one of the reasons for all the name-calling between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children came from the parents. As she states,

It's the perception that kids come with you know from home and I think sometimes parents don't feed their kids good messages about not just Aboriginal

people but people of the world you know.

Gabrielle believes that older people are more racist than the younger generations. She said that her older relatives do not like non-Aboriginal people visiting their homes. Gabrielle tells them, "we can't hold it against them, that wasn't them you know it was their fathers and grandfathers who did that". Gabrielle was referring to the racist experiences she had as a girl on the reserve in the country. The policy of segregation and the forced removal of lighter skinned Aboriginal people directly affected her as she had one of her children removed and placed in a foster home. She said that when she was younger she was very prejudiced against non-Aboriginal people but since her daughters have married into non-Aboriginal families she has welcomed them into her home and her attitude has changed.

Individuals are socially integrated by a complex, multi-layered system between the individual, their significant others and key institutions. The images and discourses that individuals interact with create their perception of reality. Aboriginal parents feel that non-Aboriginal children are influenced by their parents. The parents' attitudes would be influenced by their own experiences in the past. The past was dominated by a modernist perspective in which Aboriginal people were marginalised, oppressed and discriminated against. The texts, images and discourses available at the time excluded Aboriginal people and created a negative stereotype which still exists today (Muecke 1992).

Negative Interactions between Teachers and Aboriginal Children

All of the parents could recall negative incidents which their child had experienced with teachers at school. Many more negative incidents than positive incidents were identified. This may be because negative incidents are more likely to be remembered than normal classroom behaviour and as a result cannot be used as an indication of the general classroom environment for Aboriginal children.

The parents felt that teachers with a negative attitude were impeding their children's academic progress and attitude towards school. The types of negative interactions they experienced included: Teachers having a low expectation of their child's ability, teachers not considering their child's background or culture, children being wrongly accused for misbehaviour, teachers disbelieving a child's version of an event and teachers punishing their children more severely than non-Aboriginal children.

Low expectation of a child's ability.

Two of the parents interviewed commented that some teachers had low expectations for their children and this was reflected in their marks. Walter placed his son's academic performance as mid-bottom in the classroom but feels he is capable of better. He stated, "Maybe the thing that worries me in John's case is the expectation that his classroom teacher seems to set for him. There is no expectation that he can do the work or anything like that". Walter stated that the teacher didn't develop his son's potential or his abilities. He felt that his son was capable of getting higher marks if he was encouraged. As Walter explained,

In one little session he suddenly got really studious and came back with some excellent marks, like his maths was nine out of ten and his spelling was ten out of ten, comprehension was seven out of ten and he jumped up two or three points. So maybe there's an expectation there of the teacher. They're just prepared to accept what he does rather than what he can do. They won't develop his abilities or potential.

Lisa also reported that teachers tend to have low expectations of Aboriginal children's ability. At the high school which Lisa's eldest daughter attends there were fifteen Aboriginal students doing post-compulsory schooling. Lisa's daughter was the only one in the group who was taking TEE subjects. Lisa said,

At the careers information night they were mainly giving information out about

Tech (TAFE) and not so much about going on to year eleven. They were making it look easier to go to Tech and I thought, No this is not right.

Tertiary Entrance Examination (TEE) is the exam which students take at the end of year 12 to gain admission to tertiary institutions. Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Colleges do not require students to sit the TEE exam. In this situation Lisa was concerned that the careers information people were assuming that Aboriginal students did not have the ability or interest to go on to tertiary studies. As a result of this guidance, students were choosing TAFE without realising the full range of choices and possibilities open to them. It is only the fact that Lisa is an Aboriginal Liaison Officer (ALO) with a good understanding of the school system that she was able to advise her daughter to go on to year 11. Aboriginal children whose parents are ignorant of the system rely on careers information nights to make their choices and this is indicated by the rate of students who did choose TAFE over the TEE.

The Aboriginal parents interviewed for this study attended school in the 1950s to the 1970s where there was the common belief that Aboriginal students failed at school because of their lower I.Q., impoverished home life and poor parenting skills rather than because of inadequacies of the education system, the prejudice they faced at school or the active resistance by Aboriginal people to the cultural destruction implicit in many educational programmes. All the parents could relate negative experiences of their schooling, particularly how they were treated by the teachers. They all felt that they could have done better at school but were not given the chance to prove themselves. Six of the parents claimed that they were regularly punished by caning and detention and that school life was so bad that they left at the first opportunity.

Teacher's Lack of Understanding of the Aboriginal Child's Home Life.

Four out of the seven parents interviewed claimed that teachers did not understand the culture and home life of their children. Aboriginal child-rearing practices and culture

are markedly different to non-Aboriginal children (Kearins, 1984; Malin, 1990) and the parents felt the teachers were unaware of this. Lisa and Linda both quoted teachers as saying, "I've got 25 other students in this class I can't waste my time with one child", and, "I treat all the children in my class the same". This attitude creates problems for ethnic minority students in cross-cultural classrooms where the children come to school with differing expectations, values and skills from the teacher and the mainstream population (Malin 1990).

Lisa describes this cultural conflict that Aboriginal children experience from home to school in the following passage,

Teachers do tend to come from you know better homes, middle class families, more advantages and don't really understand how difficult it is for many Aboriginal students. I know myself that the transition that the Aboriginal kids go through daily when they leave home and arrive at school is really huge. Because they come from a very unstructured environment most of them, where things are not done to time, or any pattern, there is not all that law and order in their home that there is at school. So what the teachers expect to be happening on the home front is not there ... most of the homes that these kids come from are lucky to have a lounge chair and a bed to sleep in and a table and chair, let alone a pin-up board to put up messages and mummy going through their bags when they get home to find their teacher's notes for them or providing them with signed excursion notes and permission slips. You look at a lot of the kids that are just year seven who have six or seven siblings under them and they are practically totally responsible for helping to look after those siblings and they come to school with the world on their shoulders. Not just helping to take care of the kids but if parents are drinking and on drugs or whatever they even take the responsibility of getting mum's key card and getting the money first to feed the family before it's all spent. They carry a huge burden and they come to school and the teacher looks at them the wrong way or says anything a bit sharp and they just go off the deep end. They either act out or get in trouble and get time-out or suspension or

they just become introverted and again the teachers will say, "What is wrong with the child?"

This belief concurs with that of Kearins, (1984); Harris, (1987); and Malin, (1990) who have examined the differences in child-rearing practices and learning styles between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. Non-Aboriginal children have decisions made for them by adults and are trained to obey adults and heed verbal instructions. Aboriginal families expect their children to make their own decisions and do not require obedience or attendance to verbal instructions by adults. When Aboriginal students first attend schools in they are a small minority they find that their language, skills and experiences differ. Also they may be regarded as disobedient or ignorant by the teacher. Their own skills go unrecognised and so are the conflicts they experience with the school system.

Linda agreed with these comments when she stated,

They've (the teachers) got to understand Aboriginals, we are completely different to them we are not the same as them. They don't understand what it is to go without a feed, or not to have shoes and socks and to be walking to school with just a little dress on freezing, they wouldn't understand what that's about. And yet they can still say well if these kids (the non-Aboriginal children) can do it (the school work) so can they. Some of the kids have big problems in the home, drinking problems. The family all come round and stay for about a week to a month and in between then the family are socialising and things like that and that kid probably doesn't get no sleep and so that kid's coming to school sick and tired and everything and they are screaming at him when they come to school.

Linda said she often felt angry that the teachers and principals don't take into account the home life of the Aboriginal children. One child was well behaved last year but this year has become really disruptive. This boy has an Aboriginal mother and a non-Aboriginal father who have separated. As Linda describes,

When he's living with the white dad he's putting the Aboriginal part of it down and the kids not proud of that. One thing these kids are proud of is their Aboriginality. I know there's problems because he was a good kid last year and he came back really angry. I tried to explain to the principal and his teacher this sort of thing and she said, "Oh look Linda I don't really care what it is". You know that kind of attitude and I get really cross.

Linda is an AEW at the school and she said that often the children will confide in her about things from home that they wouldn't confide to teachers because they don't trust them. She finds it annoying however that the teachers don't bother to take the time to ask her about any of the children who are misbehaving to find out the reasons behind their actions.

In the Aboriginal child's home life there is not such a sharp distinction between adult and child as there is in Anglo homes (Malin 1990). Aboriginal children are treated as adults from an early age and are expected to act in an adult manner. This social maturity can often get them into trouble when they act like this in the classroom and do not defer to the teacher. Gabrielle, Linda and Lisa all described interactions their daughters have had with teachers when they have spoken up to defend themselves.

Gabrielle's daughter, Debra, has been brought up in the Nyoongar way in which the eldest has to look after the younger children. Because of this responsibility the older children become much more self-reliant and autonomous than most non-Aboriginal children (Malin 1990). These traits which are encouraged at home often lead the Aboriginal child into trouble at school where these qualities are not encouraged. In the classroom situation, Debra used to jump out of her chair to help other children if they needed it and wanted to have her say in any dispute. Gabrielle said that Debra's previous teacher was constantly reprimanding her and calling her up to the school to speak to the teacher about her behaviour. Gabrielle felt the teacher did not understand

her daughter and misread her actions as defiance rather than autonomy. Since then Debra has had a teacher who is more understanding of Aboriginal culture and Debra's marks have improved to the extent that she is now above average in all areas and she has begun to really enjoy school.

Lisa's daughter has had many altercations with teachers and she and her husband have been called up to the school many times to talk to the teacher. Lisa described one case as follows,

It happened last year where she felt that she wasn't the one doing wrong in the room. The teacher had sort of picked on her a bit and she wanted to stand up for herself and plead her case but the teacher didn't let her and just reported her as making a cheeky remark. We just had to say to her, "Look you know the classroom teacher is the boss and the only way you are ever going to survive in that class is to listen to what she says.

Linda's daughter also is very strong willed and stands up for her friends in the classroom. One of her friends was a Vietnamese girl and she felt she was being picked on by the teacher. The teacher had said to her friend, "Well if you want to do things like that go back to your country and do it like that". Alison replied to the teacher, "Why don't you go back to your country, I'm the only one from here".

When parents are questioned about their childrens behaviour in the classroom they will often explain it as a part of their personality and not as an outright defiant action.

Gabrielle described Debra as a "fidgety little girl that has to have her say". Lisa describes her daughter as strong willed and strong minded. Mary has a daughter in year five and she often gets into trouble at school for aggressive behaviour. Mary explained as follows,

Well they can't get their agro out at school and hit somebody. Last week Catherine was in the classroom and she wasn't sort of taking any notice of what

the teachers spoke to her about...but she got the chair and flung it off the desk. This is her way of showing that she wanted to let a bit of agro out, so she took it out on her chair and she ended up with a detention notice.

Mary had to explain to her daughter that when the teacher is in the front of the class you need to respect her and listen to what she is saying.

Blame for misbehaviour and punishment.

The parents felt that when teachers dealt with issues such as misbehaviour in class and fighting the Aboriginal child was often blamed without finding out the whole story first. Also the non-Aboriginal children involved were not punished to the same degree as the Aboriginal child. Four of the parents stated that the teachers would not listen to their child's version of the events and they were punished for things that they had not done.

Furthermore when the parents came to the school to talk with the teachers they were often told their children were lying to them which made the parents feel frustrated and powerless towards the school system. Theresa related three incidents which happened to her son at school. She described her son as "very quiet, definitely not the rowdy type" yet he was blamed and punished on each occasion for something he didn't do. In the first account he was sent out of the class with a group of other boys for giggling. When he stood up to walk outside the chair had stuck to his legs and it fell to the floor. The teacher accused him of throwing the chair against the wall and would not believe her son when he tried to explain himself.

On another occasion her son saw two older children throwing stones, chasing and kicking some younger children in the playground. When her son went to help the younger boys the older boys began throwing rocks at her son. Her son started to retaliate when a teacher caught them. Theresa said that her son was the only

Aboriginal child in the group and was blamed for causing all the trouble. He ended up getting time out while the actual trouble makers weren't punished.

In the third incident, her son was walking home from school with an Aboriginal friend. A non-Aboriginal boy on a bike started swearing at them and calling them names. Her son's friend started to fight but her son didn't get involved. The school was informed about the incident and the result was that her son and his friend got suspended for a week. The boy who instigated the whole affair was not punished at all. When Theresa went to the school to talk to the principal she found she could not get the principal to believe her son's version of the events. She stated,

My argument was that it was after school-time and basically he had no part in it. The principal had the cheek to say that he was blocking the other entrance to the alley way. And I said, "How could you say that you weren't even there?", and he said, "Oh I think he's having a little go at us". And I said, "No, my son doesn't lie to me, I've raised them properly. He knows not to lie to me because I don't like that but I've never really instilled it in him, he wouldn't tell me because he feared me, he would tell me he was lying, he tells the truth. He said to me, "No mum, I was just standing there waiting because they had already got through the alley-way." He was just waiting for his friend.

Walter related another incident when his child, who attended a special school, was often blamed and suspended for things that often weren't his fault. Walter said,

I went to the school to sort it out and say it's not on. I had to tell the principal and the classroom teachers about him and work out some solution because what was happening was that all these things would happen and the end result was suspension and we weren't aware of all the things that were happening except this suspension. I said, "We could have prevented it if we'd have been informed" and then I asked my son how he got suspended and half the reasons weren't his fault. You know what your kids will do and what they won't do and some of the stuff

You know what your kids will do and what they won't do and some of the stuff didn't fit into his manner. He's a physical person, he'll grab you round the arm and hug you and that sort of stuff and they were saying he was beating up in the playground and stuff like that and it's not in his nature to do that. So these were some of the things we had to work out.

Tony believes that some principals and teachers turn a blind eye to the fact that their schools may have racial problems despite the fact that for many Aboriginal students racism is a fact of their daily lives. When Tony was an ALO at North School, the Aboriginal parents and AEW told him that this was a racist high school. Tony told the principal that he needed to conduct a cross-cultural in-service as soon as possible. The principals reaction was to say, "I don't believe that there is a racist attitude within this high school". Tony replied, "This is coming from the Aboriginal community back to me through the district office regarding this high school". The principal would only say "No" and refuse to acknowledge that there were any problems.

Positive Interactions

Positive interactions were classified as those interactions the Aboriginal child experienced which were pleasant. These included friendships the child has made at school with non-Aboriginal children as well as teachers and schools which were supportive and understanding of their children.

Positive Interactions between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Children

All of the parents interviewed stated that their children mixed with children from all cultures at school and there was very little segregation in the primary schools. This is in contrast to the high schools where some of the parents were worried about the gang-like warfare which was happening between the Asian and Aboriginal students.

All the parents that were interviewed said they encouraged their children to mix with

the Aboriginal children became friends because they get together regularly after school at the homework centres. Walter believed that in the primary school racist behaviour among children doesn't really begin until after year five. This view was supported by the other parents. The parents who had children in the lower grades (from year one to four), did not report problems with other children at school.

Two of the respondents' children had made close friendships with Vietnamese children in primary school and this carried over into high school. These friendships transcended the gang behaviour of high school where there appears to be in-and out-of-school fighting between the "Dragon Boys" and Aboriginal gangs. This is illustrated by the following comments made by Theresa when her son, who is now at high school, met a primary school Vietnamese friend at a local shopping mall.

They both walked into the shop and started playing games and talking and all these Asian fellas were all just standing there just staring at them knocking about, they were completely shocked you know. How dare he talk to him.

Linda also stated that the reason her children didn't fight with Vietnamese children was because of the friendships they made in primary school. Linda explained this in the following passage.

He's (her son) got Vietnamese kids that are friends and all his Aboriginal friends are fighting with the Vietnamese kids. The Vietnamese kids see my two kids and they never, never fight them because they know my kids have always been friends with the Vietnamese kids.

Although these children have maintained close friendships with Vietnamese children they still use racist name calling in some situations. Linda said two of her children attended a high school which had a lot of inter-group fighting between the Asian and Aboriginal students. Although her children do not get involved in the fighting, when they talked about the Asian gangs they use racist names such as "chogey", and "slope

head". Linda described how she reacted when she heard her children talking in this way,

When they do make a racial slur at home, me and my husband we just tell them, No you don't say that here, and we say, How would you like it if we said that about your best friend? Would you say that to him? The children say, "Oh but he's not like them".

Linda said her children know that she definitely does not like them to talk like that at home.

From a recent study of racist attitudes and practices among children in majority white schools in Britain, Troyna and Hatcher (1992) have demonstrated that the relationship between racist attitudes and racist behaviours is problematic. They concluded, "a number of combinations of attitudes and behaviours is possible, ranging from children who hold racist beliefs but do not express them in behaviour, to children who hold racially egalitarian beliefs but use racist name-calling in certain situations. It follows that racist incidents have a variety of social meanings" (p.198). As children are socialised both at home and at school it appears that Linda's children are receiving conflicting messages which they are trying to accommodate. If racist incidents are to tackled effectively the racial categories which the children are using need to be replaced with others which give children a more plausible explanation of the way things are. They also need to understand how and why they have come to use these categories to make meaning. There is a need in schools to change the curriculum so that it develops in children an understanding of the social, political, and cultural functioning of racism

The following incident demonstrates that even a token change in the curriculum can lead to greater awareness and tolerance for other cultures. Tony reported that a class of year eight students were discussing Aboriginal studies and what they wanted to learn from it. One of the children in the class who had recently arrived from South

Africa called out, "I believe that black people should be kept at the back". Although there were no Aboriginal children in the class, all the other children in the class, in particular one Asian girl, knew this was wrong and defended the Aboriginal culture. Tony said that the class became really angry about this attitude and the argument proceeded for the entire lesson in defence of Aboriginal people.

Postmodernists such as Derrida (1978), Gilroy (1990) and Jameson (1984), would argue that in this case the introduction of the discourses on Aboriginal culture has changed the students' perceptions. The previous discourses available in the school curriculum on Aboriginal people have mainly stereotyped them as a primitive nomadic race with little culture or worth in today's society. When the old narratives were challenged and deconstructed the students' perception of Aboriginality also changed. School knowledge has a powerful impact on a child's sense of what is "real" and these are construed differently across time. The colonial concept of Aboriginality is still operating in many peoples' minds as is indicated by the perceptions of the boy from South Africa. If schooling in Australia is to become truly multicultural then there is a need to reexamine and question the curriculum, the texts and the knowledge they impart to ensure that the old grand narratives are deconstructed and correspond more closely to what is "real" in the outside world of the school. This means that the experiences and perceptions of students from all cultures are represented. Until this is achieved it can be argued that the modernist perspective is still a strong feature of schooling in Australia.

Positive Interactions between Teachers and Aboriginal Children

All of the parents interviewed had experienced a teacher who had a positive attitude towards their children. A positive attitude on the part of the teacher was often quoted as a reason for their child's success at school. In contrast with other teachers, these teachers had an understanding and interest in Aboriginal culture and language. This included incorporating Aboriginal studies in the curriculum, taking an active part in

the after school homework centres, showing interest in the students as individuals and making personal contact with the parents on a regular basis. High expectations of academic performance combined with positive reinforcement by the teacher was also a reason quoted for their children succeeding at school. These teachers were found to be atypical of the usual class room teacher.

A knowledge of Aboriginal culture.

Linda spoke about one of the teachers, Miss Brown, at her school who takes a real interest in Aboriginal culture and the effect this has on the Aboriginal children at the school. She says,

All the Aboriginal kids in the school they just absolutely respect her. She's got Aboriginal art in the classroom, she's had Aboriginal guest speakers in this school and at the homework centre she's even using Aboriginal for teaching the kids some of the language.

Linda claimed that Miss Brown regularly experienced opposition from other teachers in the school about the interest she takes in the Aboriginal children. One Aboriginal girl whom she taught two years ago in year four is still unable to read in year six. Miss Brown has continued to teach her reading despite the fact she was not in her class anymore. Linda heard comments from other teachers such as, "that's the other teacher's responsibility" and "I've got 34 other children in my class I can't waste my time with one child". Miss Brown claimed she was just trying to make the other teacher aware of the problems of one of her students. Linda said that through the efforts of Miss Brown the girl has now begun to read and also the attitude of the class teacher has changed to the extent that she is now saying, "that's wonderful what you are doing".

Gabrielle has also noticed a marked difference in her daughter's performance at school since she has had an understanding teacher. In previous years Debra's marks were

since she has had an understanding teacher. In previous years Debra's marks were low and she was constantly reprimanded in the classroom. Gabrielle was often called up to the school in response to Debra's misbehaviour. Debra disliked school and was often absent. Miss Green, her present teacher is involved with the homework centre and also teaches Aboriginal studies. Since having Miss Green for the last two years Debra's marks have improved to the extent that she is now above average in all areas, she never misses school and is not misbehaving in the classroom. Gabrielle says,

I think it's a lot to do with the teacher up there. She takes a lot of time out for Debra and she's good to me. She (Miss Green) says, Gabrielle when you want to come up and look at Debra's work we'll go through it and that.

Gabrielle felt that when the teacher took a personal interest in the student and the parent it had a positive effect on the students performance in the classroom. Lisa also believed this had an improved effect on her daughters performance who is now in year seven. Last year her daughter had a lot of clashes with the teacher and she had to go to the school many times. This year she is not having any problems with the teacher and as Lisa explained it,

She would really try to understand where my daughter was coming from and make herself available if she wanted to talk to her, not come down on her so heavy when she couldn't handle a situation.

It is this genuine concern and interest in the student which the parents feel is very important when teaching their children. It is not only cultural understanding and personal interest which parents felt was important for their child's success. Teachers who had high expectations of academic performance combined with positive reinforcement was also considered an important attribute. Walter credited one of his son's improved performance at school on the higher expectations and reinforcement of the teachers at the high school. As he says,

I think the teaching staff at Big High School they sort of encourage him and

better". With comments like that it makes a difference. He's gone home with commendation slips every week for excellent work, handing work in on time, coming prepared to each class, prepared to participate, stuff like that. I think all those things encourage him and his attitude changed from last year.

These parents' comments reflect what current government reports and research have discovered about some of the reasons behind Aboriginal students success or failure at school. Research undertaken by Wunungmurra (1987) and McInerney (1989) discovered that Aboriginal parents blamed poor teaching methods, insensitive teachers and principals who did not understand Aboriginal culture and an inappropriate school curriculum as reasons for absenteeism and difficulties with school work.

The Task Force on Aboriginal Social Justice (1994) and the WAAECG (1987) also have argued that the culturally alien environment, lack of culturally appropriate programs and the prejudiced attitudes among some teaching staff towards Aboriginal students was creating low academic aspirations in Aboriginal students. While this is only a small study, the marked difference in performance of the children who do have positive teachers indicates that the attitude of the teacher is vitally important for Aboriginal children's academic success.

Consequences of Interactions the Aboriginal Child Experienced with Non-Aboriginal Children and Teachers

The following section describes and discusses the consequences of these interactions for the Aboriginal child. The consequences were categorised as: the type and extent of school and parental involvement, the academic success or failure for the Aboriginal child because of this involvement and the effect these incidents had on the child's self-identity.

School and Parent Involvement in Incidents of Teasing and Bullying

This section examines how the school and the parent each dealt with the incidents of teasing, bullying and fighting experienced by the Aboriginal child. The parents related the conflict their children felt at school between obeying school rules and defending their identity and honour when they were teased or bullied by other children. They also described how the school dealt with the situation and the consequences these had for their children.

All the parents advised their children to ignore racial comments and reminded them of the consequences if they fight at school. Linda described to me how her daughter felt when teased,

She has got a really bad temper and she said to me, "Mum, I'm sorry. If anybody calls me that I'm going to hit them. And that is how she is you know.

Linda said that she has always taught her daughter to ignore these comments because fighting will lead to suspension which affects her education. Recently Linda's daughter was teased at school by another girl.

She knows we don't want her to fight this girl and she has been really strong and she has walked away from a real lot of it. But if they ever catch her you know, when you have a bad day, that's it.

Four of the seven parents interviewed said their child had been suspended or got detention for fighting. Suspension means that these children are not only missing out on school work they are also segregated socially from their peers and teachers. Often the child who instigated the affair was not punished at all, as in the case of Theresa's and Walter's children described on pages 52-53.

In these cases the principal was in a position of power and exercised this power over the Aboriginal children and Theresa. Theresa had just come from the country at this time and was unfamiliar with urban schools. As a result she felt in a vulnerable

time and was unfamiliar with urban schools. As a result she felt in a vulnerable position and was unable to stand up for her rights. The discriminatory attitude of the principal is serious because of the position of power that he represents. School is a major social institution many of society's values are learnt. The Aboriginal child would have learnt from this situation that being Aboriginal means that often you will be significantly disadvantaged. If there is no chance of success in a system which regularly oppresses and ignores you then there is no reason to try and succeed. In this situation Theresa was so upset at the attitude of the principal that she transferred her children to another school in the area.

All the children involved in the study were aware that it was against school rules to fight but often they chose to ignore the rules and stand up for their own perceived rights. Their parents advised them of the consequences of their actions but the children are not compelled to comply with adult directives. Particularly as Walter stated, "this is because as the years go on at school they become more and more defensive till they reach the point where they react and respond by fighting". If children perceive that the school is not intervening effectively on their behalf then the child will act to obtain justice for themselves. Mary explained the situation to her children in this way,

I teach my kids, well the best thing you can do is walk away because if you try and punch them in the mouth at school you're the one who is going to end up with detention not that other kid and its been happening here you know. I mean every week or so I get a detention notice. From the point of view of the parents they are teaching their children how to survive the school system by reminding them of the consequences. They view the school as operating against them by not supporting their children when they are teased and punishing them for acting autonomously.

Mary described a situation in which her daughter had been picked on by a non-

I went up to the office to talk about the situation so that the teachers know up there. And they gave me an explanation, they said, "Well she is a problem child at the school, she does that sort of thing." Mary replied, " Yeah but if she is going to keep doing that to my daughter, I will not encourage my kids to fight at school but out of school is out of bounds. We've been taught that haven't we?

In this situation Mary wanted to make sure that the girl stopped picking on her daughter. From her point of view, if the school was reluctant to intervene then she could see no wrong in allowing her daughter to defend herself in her own way. Because as she said, "This girl needs to learn a lesson".

Not all of the children fought if they were teased or bullied. Some of the children chose to ignore the comments, while others felt hurt that their friends turned on them and could not understand why they should be picked on. Gabrielle's foster daughter Debra was recently teased at school by girls who used to be her friends. Gabrielle explains the situation as follows,

She was mixing with them the other day, she was telling me this girl said to her, "Why should I play with you, your black?" She said to me, "Mum I'm not black am I?" I said, "No you're not, she's not worthy to be your friend if she can call you that.

Debra is really conscious of the colour of her skin and hates anyone to say that she has nice brown skin. Gabrielle blames these feelings on Debra's step-father who is part Nyoongar but doesn't identify with the culture and always puts Aboriginal people down. Gabrielle says she always tries to make her children and grandchildren feel proud to be Nyoongar and says,

Look Debra, I'm a Nyoongar and I'm proud of it you know. I always tell her, your colour is precious. You know it doesn't matter what they are, at least you don't have to lay on the beach to get brown and she gets happy then.

Gabrielle's granddaughter who is the same age as Debra is proud of her Aboriginal culture and reacts differently to Debra if she is ever teased. Gabrielle says,

She doesn't care if they accept her or don't accept her and even when I go up to the school she don't care, she just runs up and grabs me and kisses me".

It appears that it is very important for Aboriginal children to receive positive messages about their Aboriginality from their home life in order to have a strong personal identity and to have the strength to withstand the name calling and teasing at school. It is also evident that even though Aboriginal parents encourage their children to be autonomous they will intervene if the situation starts to get out of hand or if the child asks them.

Consequences of Interactions with Teachers

Six of the seven parents related incidents where their child clashed with a teacher in the classroom. These clashes mostly occurred when the student spoke up after they felt that the teacher had treated them unfairly or the teacher felt they were transgressing a class rule such as getting out of their seat or helping other children with their school work. The teachers appeared to misinterpret this behaviour as an act of defiance and responded by reprimanding and reporting the child to the principal. These clashes continued through the school year and the parents found they were constantly being called up to the school to talk to the teacher. The parents response was to defend their child as they were looking at the situation from their child's perspective and could understand why they acted in this way. The following responses illustrate how the parents tried to explain and defend their child's behaviour to the teacher or principal.

Linda explained her daughters clashes with her teacher to the principal in this way,

I explained that this is her character and something that we don't want to crush. You need it for life. I mean sure she needs control and she needs love and to

respect but it's going to hold her in good stead for life and she'll never be pushed around.

When Mary was called up to the school to talk about why her daughter threw a chair in class this is how she explained the behaviour to the teacher,

They can't get their agro out at school and hit somebody, so she got the chair and flung it off the desk. This is her way of showing that she wanted to let a bit of agro out, so she took it out on her chair and then she ended up with a detention notice."

Gabrielle's foster daughter had problems with a teacher when she was in year three and Gabrielle had to speak to the teacher. She tried to explain her daughter's actions to the teacher in this way,

Debra is a funny little girl, we in the Nyoongar way the biggest has to look after the smallest and in the Nyoongar way they get a lot of responsibility on them. In the classroom she wants to have her say and she can't understand it's the teachers role. She's a fidgety little girl and she thinks she has to have her say and it's different at school.

Despite this explanation Debra was still being picked on and the teacher started to throw chalk at her. Gabrielle went to see the principal to complain. This is how Gabrielle explains the outcome of the situation,

I went up there and I said I want to know what's going on with the teacher. He said look I am sure you are misunderstanding things, he was blaming the kids." Gabrielle said, "My heart was telling me one thing but I got so annoyed I walked off."

Like Theresa, Gabrielle found that trying to interact with the principal was a frustrating process. The principal was not prepared to take any action on her behalf and made the

parents feel they were guilty and to blame. Because they realised that the system was against them from the beginning they gave up without fully defending their rights.

What appeared to be happening in these situations was that the Aboriginal child and the teacher clashed in terms of their values and communication style (Malin 1990). These clashes lead to a lack of rapport which leads to a cycle of underachievement and marginalisation for the Aboriginal child. The teacher finds it difficult to accept the Aboriginal child if they transgress the unwritten boundary between teacher as controller and student as passive learner. Chadbourne (1984) described the classroom as a judgmental place where the teacher and peers were constantly evaluating the behaviour and work of the other students. Chadbourne explained that an Aboriginal child may not regard the consequences of these evaluations in the same light as their non-Aboriginal peers. He claimed that despite the negative reinforcement Aboriginal children may receive in the classroom they are still receiving positive messages from home. The fact that all the parents supported their child's behaviour rather than the teacher's judgement indicates that Aboriginal parents place their cultural values over the values the classroom teacher holds.

When a child does not have either a supportive home life or a supportive school system then it is likely that there will be little chance for school success. Linda related an incident which clearly showed that some Aboriginal children were getting mixed messages about their Aboriginality which made it very difficult for them to maintain a strong self-identity. This child came from a family who had recently separated. The mother was Aboriginal and the father non-Aboriginal. As Linda described it,

One thing these kids are proud of is their Aboriginality and the white father is putting the Aboriginal part of it down and confusing him. I know there's problems because last year he was a good kid and he came back really, really angry. And I tried to explain to the principal and tried to tell the teacher this sort of thing and she said, Oh look Linda, I don't care what it is.

It is likely that this child was very confused about his identity and probably could see no reason to succeed in a system which showed little empathy or understanding for his situation. There are many urban Aboriginal children experience similar circumstances. It is important that teachers are aware of the problems that these children are attempting to cope with. As Christie (1986) states, "something must be done about the appalling ignorance of so many white teachers about contemporary Aboriginal culture and values".

Aboriginal Parents Explanations of Racism Between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal People

The parents were asked what they thought were the reasons for the conflicts between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people today. Ignorance of Aboriginal culture, the education system and prejudiced attitudes in the community were the main explanations for the problems their children experienced at school and in the wider community.

All parents claimed that non-Aboriginal people were ignorant of Aboriginal culture and their past experiences. They felt that the non-Aboriginal population lacked understanding of the experiences that Aboriginal people had in the past and how this is still affecting them today. Theresa said that if non-Aboriginal people understood more Aboriginal culture, issues and history then they'd deal with Aboriginal people on a different level. Lisa felt that a lot of non-Aboriginal parents were feeding their children bad messages about Aboriginal people which stems from their own ignorance and perceptions. She felt that these attitudes have not changed a great deal from when she was at school. Walter explained this further when he said that a lot of non-Aboriginal people lacked knowledge of Aboriginal people and were not prepared to admit their ignorance and because of this they act out of ignorance. He said that this is because non-Aboriginal people don't understand what Aboriginal people see as

important . In the following passage he described a scene in which a non-Aboriginal friend of his son thought it was abnormal to have so many people in the house,

One of John's friends came over and we had a group of my people over, I think about fourteen people in the house. Unheard of in Perth. Especially in our neighbourhood but they're a noisy bunch and the kids are running around and I could imagine some of the comments behind the doors and stuff. But he couldn't understand why we had so many in the house. John said, "Oh that's my uncles, my cousins." He said to John, "Well, where do you sleep, how do you have a shower?". John said, "Just wait for your turn and when it's empty you slip in and have a shower and get out." That was something that his friend, even though he's John's friend he still couldn't understand it. That it was quite normal to have a lot of people in the house.

When the parents were asked what was the cause of this ignorance six of the parents blamed the education system, in particular the failure of the education system to implement Aboriginal Studies comprehensively into the curriculum. They all stated that with the introduction of Aboriginal Studies there will be greater understanding and tolerance and a big improvement in the attitude of non-Aboriginal people towards them. Walter felt that education was the key to changing attitudes and it is important to begin when children are young. Linda feels there is a resistance by the current government in WA to implementing Aboriginal studies. She feels that they are reluctant to introduce it because they don't want people to learn the truth about the past injustices and racist treatment Aboriginal people experienced. She feels they want to maintain the current perceptions and are scared that with Aboriginal studies they will lose power because of the information.

All of the parents felt that the racist policies from the past had created the barriers and racist attitudes that exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people today. When the parents were asked why there were problems between Aboriginal and non-

Aboriginal people they thought it was because of Aboriginal people's past experiences. All the parents had experienced the effects of the assimilation and segregation policies which were in existence in Australia. These experiences have had a profound effect on the Aboriginal people of today both in how they feel about non-Aboriginal people and how non-Aboriginal people are towards them.

Linda said that the experiences she had living on a reserve with the Native Welfare Department made her fear non-Aboriginal people and the institutions they represented such as school. In those days school was a place where you had to go or else you were taken away from your family. School was negative for Aboriginal children particularly as they didn't learn anything positive about themselves. She said that this fear is still real for a lot of Aboriginal families and they do not trust non-Aboriginal people. Gabrielle also said that her older relations are prejudiced towards non-Aboriginal people and cannot forgive them. She believes that the non-Aboriginal people of that generation were also very prejudiced and a lot of the older people in the street where she lives still reflect this attitude. She said that she has to deal with complaints and visits from the police on a regular basis over minor issues such as her children playing near another house, too many cars parked outside her house or too much smoke from the barbecue out the back. Gabrielle believes they single her out because of her Aboriginality

Theresa and Tony both talked about the barriers that still exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Tony believed that there needs to be a lot more cross-cultural in-servicing both in schools and the work place. He believed that people need to learn to respect each other more.

The Ways Aboriginal Parents Prepare their Children to deal with Racist Incidents at School

The parents were asked how they prepared their children to deal with racist incidents they may experience when they started school. The responses were coded under the following categories; history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interaction, resistance, integration, instilling pride in their Aboriginal culture and reminding them of the consequences of their actions.

History of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Interaction

All the parents interviewed said that they made sure that their children were aware of the history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interaction. They all related the experiences that they had when they were at school as well as their parents' and grandparents' experiences. Four of the seven parents had experienced life on missions and reserves. The segregation and assimilation policies of those days meant they had experienced the poverty, oppression, discrimination and forced removal of children from their parents. These memories are still very real for all Aboriginal families. Theresa said about her own times at school,

You just couldn't trust them (non-Aboriginal people), because of what they (Aboriginal people) had been through and so non-Aboriginal people have to work hard to gain our trust.

It appears that Aboriginal parents still perceive school as the domain of non-Aboriginal people. Their own schooling experiences were discriminatory and oppressive and these feelings are carried over into the present day and they are preparing their children to cope in a country in which they are a minority. When schools continue to deal with Aboriginal people in some of the ways described in this paper it is little wonder that these feelings persist. Linda supported this view when she explained Aboriginal parents feelings about school,

White school is a place where you gotta go or you get taken away from your family. So they put school in like with the Welfare system and everything like that. Instead of it being a positive thing for the kids its always been a negative

that. Instead of it being a positive thing for the kids its always been a negative thing. In a way they were forced and they also knew that the kids were learning things that wasn't anything good about themselves. It was bad things in those days that were taught about Aboriginal people”.

Although the parents made sure their children were aware of the past they also wanted relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to improve so they encouraged their children to make friends with students from all cultures. In the following passage Theresa explains how she prepares her children for school.

I've always told them my story, about how I'd been snatched away, all that sort of stuff. But I also told them to be trusting but not too trusting and not to be too judgmental. I'd like them to be really social, go out and meet everyone and anyone. The more people they get to know, especially the more non-Aboriginal people they get to know the better it is. I want them to be multicultural. Which they have. They've got friends of all colours.

This statement was supported by all the parents who realised that it is important to break down the barriers from the past by improving interpersonal relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Fighting

Six of the seven parents said that they tell their children to ignore children if they tease or bully them, while one parent said that she thinks sometimes fighting is the only way these children will learn not to pick on Aboriginal children.

Mary said that she was brought up to fight and she feels that if the school won't deal with racist teasing then she will encourage her daughter to fight. As she said,

If it is out of school and if I'm on site I will stand there and referee that fight.

That's the way we were brought up you know because definitely that's got to

Linda also said that while she tells her own children to ignore teasing she said,
I know a lot of parents who say, "If they say anything to you bash them".

Ignore the comments

From the comments of Mary and Linda it appears that these parents have experienced fighting as an acceptable way of settling grievances and disputes in their own lives. While this may have been a valid method in traditional Aboriginal communities most of the parents are aware that in today's society fighting is not accepted and the school and wider community will punish the fighter more severely than the instigator. The other parents all advised their children to ignore racial teasing at school. Walter described how he prepared his children,

We'd talk to the kids and say, what would you do if a kid called you a nigger? See we tried to make the point not to use their fists but use their brain. I said, "You've got a brain there and I think if you use it you can exercise it in a constructive way". I believe that people who make racist remarks are ignorant of the facts and to hide that fact they become racist and put other people down. I think that if you can reverse that on to them and make them feel like an idiot then you are turning round the racism thing.

Linda said that she told her daughter that there is no point in fighting because you will get suspended. She said, "You have to make yourself strong and walk away from it".

Encourage Children to be Proud of their Aboriginal Identity

Two of the parents said they tell their children to be proud of their Aboriginal culture. By feeling good about their culture the children were able to cope with the teasing and not let it affect them as much. Gabrielle said that she always told her children and grandchildren to be proud of their Nyoongar culture. She told Debra that her colour is

precious and if people tease you they are not worthy to be your friend. Walter said, "My idea was to build up my kids and feel good about themselves, that sort of thing. I try to give them the idea that the kid calling you a name, it's not your problem it's their problem. That's how I answer them and it would work to some extent.

From the points raised above it is apparent that Aboriginal parents are aware that their children will be subject to racial discrimination and they try to prepare them to deal with it. The main ways they did this was by telling them about their history and advising them to ignore the comments rather than fight.

Definitions of Racism

The parents were asked to define racism. Three of the parents defined racism as against Aboriginal people, while the other parents described it in terms of racism both by Aboriginal people and against Aboriginal people.

Three of the parents said their definition of racism was ignorance. Linda described racism in this way,

I'd definitely say ignorance, not being aware of the background of the Aboriginal child. I also think that non-Aboriginal people think they are higher than the Aboriginal people, they put themselves above not just the Aboriginal people but above every other race and are responsible for the destruction of the environment and genocide.

Linda also felt that teachers were ignorant and stereotyped Aboriginal people as black, drunk and hopeless. She said that there needed to be a lot of in-servicing so that they could get more understanding of what the Aboriginal children go through and wouldn't be so quick to jump to conclusions.

Lisa and Theresa also described racism as ignorance - not knowing enough about the Aboriginal way of life to appreciate it. Lisa also said she felt she is racist against Vietnamese people because they don't try to mix in with the rest of the community.

Tony described a racist incident he had experienced where he was not allowed into a country pub on account of his Aboriginality. He said that it stems across all nationalities but he felt that it is particularly pertinent to Aboriginal people. He accepted the fact that to some extent he is racist as he says,

I mean we hate white people. White people shouldn't have come here in the first place because they stuffed the country up. That's a form of racism.

He then talks about the policy of segregation when Aboriginal children were removed from their families and he said that is another form of racism.

Mary said that racism is discrimination and is used to pick on black people. She said that her children have been picked on because of the colour of their skin and said that a lot of the Aboriginal footballers in the AFL and the local league side are discriminated against because of the colour of their skin.

Walter describes racism in the following way,

It comes in different shapes and forms. I mean I think the underlying thing is to do with the attitude and tolerance to another group of people. Then you could probably go into it further and break that down even further and say that you put stereotypes on different groups of people from images projected by the media, books and stuff like that, that's all part of racism. I think racism is much more than just I'm black and you're white.

Gabrielle felt that racism stemmed from the discrimination Aboriginal people suffered in the past. She said,

I think a lot is on both parts (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people) they are prejudiced you know. The older ones (non-Aboriginal) are rude and don't forgive things. The young ones (non-Aboriginal) say they hate what our fathers and grandfathers done. My family are getting old and they didn't want watjallas coming here. I said we can't hold it against them. That wasn't them you know it was their fathers and grandfathers."

DISCUSSION

Overview of results

This study has looked at the experiences of Aboriginal children in urban primary schools from the perspective of their parents. The parents believe there is still widespread ignorance and misunderstanding of Aboriginal people which is indicated by the number of racist incidents the parents could recall. Racism against Aboriginal students is occurring at both the individual and institutional level. These two levels are interconnected due to the way society constructs and maintains social integration and attitudes through its key institutions such as schools, the legal system, health and government administration.

On an individual level Aboriginal children are discriminated against because of their Aboriginality. The ways in which parents felt their children are discriminated against include name-calling, bullying and teasing by non-Aboriginal students. They also felt that teachers had a low expectation of Aboriginal children's ability, an ignorance of Aboriginal culture and blamed or punished their children more than other children. The attitudes that teachers and children hold is a result of their own experiences which are formed from being socialised into a non-indigenous, western, capitalist society which does not cater for teaching in cross-cultural setting (Andrews 1993).

At an institutional level the school system is maintaining the pattern of domination by continuing to use practices and attitudes which regularly reward members of the dominant group and disadvantage others. The pattern of domination emerges through school outcomes and employment levels which show that Aboriginal people continue to remain significantly disadvantaged when compared to the dominant culture. The school's hidden curriculum sustains racism by either consciously or unconsciously transmitting the dominant group's knowledge, beliefs and attitudes. These interactions are affecting the school life of Aboriginal children and makes it difficult for them to succeed in the present school system.

The attitude of some of the teachers, principals and non-Aboriginal children indicate that there is still a lot of ignorance and stereotyping of Aboriginal people. McInerney (1992) stated that for a variety of reasons many teachers set low expectations of Aboriginal students academic performance. Wootten (1991) claimed that as Aboriginal people belong to one of the least powerful groups in society they are likely to have behavioural norms which differ from the dominant culture and these need to be recognised in order for them to receive an equitable education. These differences in behavioural norms are indicated in this study by the way in which Aboriginal children are expected in their own culture to be autonomous and self-reliant. These culturally acceptable behaviours transgress the expected behaviour of schools and as a result the Aboriginal children were often punished and marginalised for acting in such a manner.

Aboriginal people have a distinctive culture which differs markedly in many aspects from non-Aboriginal cultures. The WAAECG (1987) found that there is a popular misconception that Aboriginal people were either completely assimilated into the 'white' culture or still maintained a traditional lifestyle. This misconception has had an adverse effect on the delivery of education to Aboriginal children in urban schools who still identify with their culture. The parents felt that the teachers were not aware that most urban Aboriginal children still maintain strong ties to their Aboriginal culture even though they are living in an urban environment.

The parents feel that schools try to treat all children the same, which they feel is disadvantaging their children. Luke and Luke (1990), Baker and Freebody (1989) and Husseyn (1984) argue that the school curriculum, rules, hierarchy, classroom management styles and classroom discourses all tend to marginalise Aboriginal students and their parents and support the dominant culture. While the features of modernism are still evident in our society, the new forms of technology and information, the breakdown of 'grand narratives' and the cultural diversity in Australia

means that ethnic groups are no longer expected to form one homogenous group. There is a need for schools to reflect this change in their practices and reexamine the unquestioned acceptance of narratives from a past era.

The current discourses available on Aboriginal people still tend to describe them as a primitive race living a traditional life. There is little information presented in schools on the history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interaction, urban/rural Aboriginal life and the problems they face as a minority group. Muecke (1992) and Hollinsworth (1992b) argue that the available discourses are forming the images that non-Aboriginal people have of Aboriginal people. These negative images are implicitly taught to all students which means that non-Aboriginal children treat Aboriginal children as different and as a consequence they feel alienated from the school system. There is a need for schools to examine closely the texts available on Aboriginal people and to deconstruct and eliminate the interpretations of the ideologies implicit in them. For this to happen all teachers need to have an awareness of Aboriginal history and culture and be prepared to implement these in the classroom. Giroux (1990) claimed that by the rejection of grand narratives, there is an opportunity for subordinate groups to reclaim their history which has been barred from the modernist historical narrative. The parents in this study all believe that it is important for Aboriginal Studies to be implemented in the curriculum so that the ignorance and misunderstandings can be addressed and improve relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

There is a need for teachers to be aware that Aboriginal children come from a different culture and will have different ways of interacting and learning than children from other cultures.

Malin (1990), Kearins (1984) and Christie (1986) have discovered that the Aboriginal child typically values personal relationships over competitive work so they tend to work for people they like not because they are told to. If they perceive that the teacher lacks any real empathy or understanding of them they will quickly lose respect and act

up in the class. This is indicated in the number of cases the parents related where their child would have a difficult year with one teacher and the next year get a more understanding teacher. Not only did their classroom behaviour improve but also their academic standing in the class.

The management style of some teachers and principals is causing cultural clashes and making school life difficult for the Aboriginal child. The fact that non-Aboriginal culture and schools rely on children obeying rules, having decisions made for them and to obey adults unquestioningly means that Aboriginal children often transgress school rules. Aboriginal children in this survey were punished more severely than their non-Aboriginal counterparts when they were involved in incidents such as fighting, even when the non-Aboriginal child had initiated the event. The Aboriginal child could not understand the reasons for their punishment when they believed they were acting in a culturally acceptable way. The consequence of this was that schools were lowering the chances of Aboriginal children's success because of the time they spend in suspension and detention.

The consequence of these attitudes was that children lack respect for these teachers and do not feel they have to work for them. A cycle of resistance and school failure develops. The covert nature of racism within the school setting appears to be creating a cycle of failure and marginalisation for Aboriginal children.

From this study it clearly shows that building positive relationships between the teacher and the Aboriginal child is vitally important for their school success. These findings concur with McInerney (1992) who found that one of the factors which motivate an urban Aboriginal child to continue at school is through school support from teachers and peers. As Lisa said, they are not looking for special treatment, but they need to feel that the teacher understands where they are coming from and shows genuine warmth and compassion. The parents have mentioned that teachers who are

highly regarded by their children are ones who include Aboriginal culture in the curriculum, assist at the homework centre, make use of AEW's in the classroom and make personal contact with Aboriginal parents on a regular basis.

All the parents felt that schooling is much better now for their children than when they were at school. They all claimed that the introduction of homework centres, the ASSPA Committees, the presence of AEW's and ALO's in the schools and in some classes the introduction of Aboriginal studies is making school a more welcoming place for their children. What hasn't changed and which is a cause of concern is the school's hidden curriculum such as the teacher's management style, curriculum content and modes of communication.

Schools need to be aware that many Aboriginal families do not feel welcome in the present school system and still perceive school as the domain of non-Aboriginal people. Their own experiences at school were oppressive and racist and they are aware that their own children are entering a system where there is going to be racist attitudes from some of the school population. Despite their own experiences all the parents encouraged their children to mix but also told them about their own experiences and warned them that they will encounter teasing and bullying. They are aware that school rules forbid their children to retaliate by fighting so warn them to ignore the comments. Schools need to be aware that many Aboriginal children come to school with a knowledge of the injustices and mistreatment their parents have experienced. There is a need for teachers and principals to be sensitive when they deal with Aboriginal children. Schools need to be aware that these children come from a background where fighting may be an acceptable means of settling a dispute and that most Aboriginal children will attempt to deal with a situation themselves rather than consult a teacher, particularly if they are non-Aboriginal.

Most of the parents described racism as ignorance of the background of Aboriginal

people. The past narratives have functioned to socialise most non-Aboriginal people into stereotyping Aboriginal people as lazy, drunk and untrustworthy. There has been little information released to the general public about the injustices and discriminatory policies which have led to the present situation. There is a need for these grand narratives from the past to be deconstructed and for more Aboriginal people to be allowed to tell their own story. By creating localised narratives there is more chance for the barriers to be broken down between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Schools can play a key role by educating all students about the history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interaction from both perspectives. In this way a more balanced view of Aboriginal people will arise and improve relationships.

Need for Further Research

This study has looked at racism from the perspective of Aboriginal parents. From the information gathered from this study it is apparent that there is a need for further research in a number of areas. Firstly there needs to be a more in-depth investigation of racism in schools. Aboriginal students are only one of many minority groups and it would be of interest to examine the extent of racist attitudes and how these affect other minority groups. This study mainly looked at primary aged children, further research needs to be done on the extent of racism in high schools and tertiary institutions and the impact racism has on their education.

Secondly there is a need to examine how effective teacher education programmes are in reducing prejudice. The parents in this study all stated that most teachers are ignorant of Aboriginal culture. A study which compared the attitudes of teachers towards Aboriginal students who have received cross-cultural training as opposed to those who haven't would reveal vital information on how attitudes are formed and how they can be changed.

Thirdly there needs to be an investigation on the effect Aboriginal Studies has on the

attitudes of non-Aboriginal students towards Aboriginal students. In this study one of the parents commented that after the students had some lessons in Aboriginal culture they were quick to defend them against other prejudiced students. This was only one incident and it would be a benefit to investigate if Aboriginal Studies has an effect on attitudinal changes over time.

Finally this study could be extended further to interview not only Aboriginal parents but also their children, the teachers, principals and non-Aboriginal children. In this way a more rounded picture of the situation would develop and many more factors could be examined.

Limitations to the study

This study had a number of limitations due to the nature of the research. This study dealt with complex personal and social issues in a cross-cultural setting. Instigating rapport proved difficult in the initial stages of the project. As the inquirer was not Aboriginal and had limited contact with Aboriginal people it was difficult to find Aboriginal people who were willing to be interviewed. This was understandable considering the personal nature of the interviews and the mistrust most Aboriginal people feel when dealing with non-Aboriginal people. In order to counteract the influence of this factor, verification of the bona fides of the inquirer by credible mutual acquaintances was sought. By becoming acquainted with the Aboriginal community on a personal level the inquirer was able to develop a strong rapport. This rapport was evident by the amount of trust the parents had in relating issues of a sensitive nature from their past as well as the present time.

This study was looking at how Aboriginal parents perceived schooling for their children. Knowledge based on human experience is not necessarily trustworthy and the case study method, unlike statistical research is unable to be replicated or rejected on testing of the null hypothesis. To increase validity the inquirer ensured the

reporting and observations were accurate. These observations were validated by confirming initial responses with the respondents by showing them the tape transcripts. The fact that all the respondents related similar experiences also validated their responses.

The responses in this study represented what Aboriginal parents perceived about their child's ability or performance at school. Teachers may have differing perceptions about their childrens' academic ability and the reasons for their success or failure. It was not within the scope of this study to interview other children or teaching staff. Further studies could look at interviewing others and/or looking at individuals' report cards to confirm the parents' responses

The inquirer and/or the reader of the study could misinterpret the findings due to a cultural or language barrier. For this reason the inquirer conferred with colleagues on the relevance of the insights and reported on the findings in such a way so as to reduce misinterpretation. This was done by ensuring the inquirer had a clear understanding of the situation by becoming acquainted with all relevant literature so that the conclusions were drawn from a sound conceptual background.

CONCLUSION

This study has set out to examine how parents perceive schooling for their children. In particular it interpreted their stories, using racism as the central construct of analyses. Their discourses were interpreted from which a number of key themes and issues were drawn out. The main issues that emerged were the types of interactions their children experienced at school, the consequences of these interactions and how Aboriginal parents prepare their children to deal with these interactions. The study also revealed what Aboriginal parents explanations and constructions of racism were.

The results of this study indicate that schooling for most Aboriginal children and their parents remains culturally alien. Most non-Aboriginal teachers and students have little knowledge or understanding of Aboriginal children's home life and culture and this is reflected in their interactions with them. These interactions were not always negative but the Aboriginal children in this study had all experienced racist name calling and discriminatory treatment by non-Aboriginal students and teachers. The consequences of these interactions depended on how schools dealt with the situations. The Aboriginal parents felt that when the schools failed to consider the Aboriginal background of their children, or had a negative attitude towards their children based on their Aboriginality then their children were marginalised and excluded and had little academic success. This is in contrast to situations where the Aboriginal parents felt that the school was tolerant of Aboriginal culture. In these situations the Aboriginal children felt welcome, accepted and had more success in the classroom.

The forms of racism were at the individual and institutional level and discriminated against them by marginalising them from the school system. At the individual level the children had experienced racist name calling by other children and by teachers who treated them less favourably than non-Aboriginal children. At the institutional level, the education system continues to fail Aboriginal children by failing to take into account their individual needs.

The parents felt the wider community's perceptions of Aboriginal people are based on ignorance and misunderstanding. They felt that some non-Aboriginal children had racist attitudes from their parents and the teachers were racist in that they did not understand or tolerate the Aboriginal culture. While it is difficult to generalise about the impact of government policy on the attitudes of a nation from this small study it tends to show that people are moulded by their perceptions and experiences. If the macro-structures are racist in their policies such as the media, police, the education system and the social services then this will be reflected in the attitudes of the individuals within that society.

From the perspective of the Aboriginal parents their past experiences with non-Aboriginal people has been one of overt racism both at the institutional and individual level. They have had to deal with teasing and bullying to a large extent in their own lives. While the parents generally advised their children to ignore these comments, they also respected their child's right to be self-reliant and self-regulating.

While institutions such as schools and politics have policies of multiculturalism and equality these are not being translated into reality as the discourses and images about Aboriginal people still remain largely Eurocentric (Luke and Luke, 1990). The education system has resisted introducing Aboriginal Studies into the curriculum and many of the present texts available either omit Aboriginal people entirely or still describe them as primitive nomadic people. These negative messages are implicitly taught to all students which means that Aboriginal children feel alienated from the education system and non-Aboriginal children also treat them as different.

Racism is a sensitive issue in education. The Social Justice in Education Policy (1991) has as one of its policies, to work towards the elimination of racism within the school environment. Schools are reluctant to address this issue which is evident from

the attitude of teachers and principals. This may be due to the unconscious nature of racism brought about by socialisation into the dominant culture. Minority cultures who do not fit into the dominant culture feel it most acutely while the mainstream population remain oblivious to the overt and covert aspects of racism.

The Task Force on Aboriginal Social Justice (1994) stated that the factors which cause low academic achievement are cultural conflict, the poor education of parents and grandparents and an irrelevant State education system. While it can be argued that these factors are common to all students of a lower socio-economic background, the culturally alien environment, lack of culturally appropriate programmes and prejudiced attitudes to Aboriginal students among peers and teaching staff further compounded the problem for Aboriginal students.

These feelings and attitudes indicate that Australian society still has a long way to go before it becomes a truly postmodern, multicultural nation. The grand narratives from the past which are evident in the school curriculum, the media and other key institutions are being maintained to effectively exclude minority groups. There has been some changes within the education system to assist Aboriginal students such as establishing ASSPA Committees, homework centres and employing AEW'S and ALO's. However the culturally alien environment, lack of culturally appropriate programmes and the racist attitudes of some students and teaching staff is maintaining the current social order. When Aboriginal students experienced teachers and students who acknowledged their culture and attempted to break down the barriers between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people the Aboriginal students tended to be more successful in the classroom. The localised knowledge and narratives which were instigated in these classrooms by the introduction of Aboriginal culture and languages and the positive attitude of the teacher meant that the schooling process became "Real" for the Aboriginal students.

APPENDIX 1

The following questions were used in the personal interviews. These questions were open ended and further questions were used in response to the issues raised by the respondent.

1. How is 'x' getting on at school?
2. Are his/her report cards good?
3. Has 'x' got many friends?
4. Does he/she have any friends who aren't Nyoongars?
5. How does he/she get on with watjalla kids?
6. How does he/she get on with teachers?
7. Has he/she had any unpleasant experiences with watjalla kids? What about name calling? What about fights after school?
8. Has he/sh. had any unpleasant experiences with teachers? Do they ever get the blame for things that happen in the classroom or playground?
9. What do you do/ say to the kids if this happens?
10. What about your own experiences at school?
11. How do you prepare your child to cope with conflicts at school?
12. What do you think the reasons are for conflicts between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people? Why do you think there's fights? Why do you think there's name calling?
13. What do you think should be done about it? Do you think your kids could do better at school? Before your children started school were you worried about them having trouble? What did you do?

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